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# How Award-winning Games Captivate their Audiences

A Thematic Analysis of Hades Reviews across Multiple Platforms

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## Abstract

Stories are as old as humans themselves and have always been a key part of what makes humans human. One of the newest forms of storytelling can be found within games. This thesis conducted a thematic analysis on reviews of the successful game Hades, investigating why it captivated its audience. Based on this analysis, a set of guidelines for creating a captivating game was created, as well as a demo of a game to illustrate selected guidelines.

## Sammandrag

Berättelser är lika gamla som mänskligheten själv och har alltid varit en viktig del av vad som gör människor till människor. Ett av de senaste sätten att berätta historier är via spel. I denna kandidatrapport genomfördes en tematisk analys på recensioner av det framgångsrika spelet Hades, och det undersöktes hur spelet fängslade sina spelare. Baserat på denna analys skapades en uppsättning riktlinjer för skapandet av fängslande spel, samt en speldemo för att illustrera utvalda riktlinjer.

Keywords: Game Experience, Player Experience, Video Games, Game Development, Game Design, Hades

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# Lexicon

**Boon** A run-temporary upgrade given by a god to Zagreus.

**Build** The chosen weapons, items, skills and settings the player has at the start of a run [1].

**Demo** From demonstration, in this paper referring to a short sample section of a game. Allows players to get an idea of what the full game will be like.

**DLC** Downloadable content. Refers to additional content that can be added to an already released game, either for free or for a fee [2].

**Dungeon Crawler** A game genre where the player navigate or battle through a labyrinth like environment, so called dungeons [3].

**Early Access** When a game is released before it is completely finished it is in an early access stage. Can be done in order for the developers to receive additional funding, feedback from players, and more.

**Keepsake** Equippable item that gives the player a certain benefit.

**Open world** The player can freely choose where to go within the game world and can approach it in a non-linear way [4].

**Roguelike** A video game genre, where the games shares some features with the game Rogue (released 1980). These features can include permanent player death (the player does not get to keep any items or upgrades and has to restart from the beginning) and a randomly generated environment. The term is often used interchangeably with the term roguelite [5], which is a genre that shares features with the roguelike genre, but generally implements these features in a more forgiving manner. There will be no distinction between these two terms in the report.

**Run** One round in the game. In Hades this means one escape attempt.

**Shade** Dead soul residing in the underworld of Hades. Can be friendly or unfriendly.

# 1

## Introduction

Stories are as old as humans themselves and have always been a key part of what makes humans human. This sentiment is echoed in the quote “Human life is so bound up in stories that we are thoroughly desensitized to their weird and witchy power.” as written by Jonathan Gottschall [6]. One of the newest forms of storytelling is found in games, and the game industry is growing more and more. For games to be successful, to be bought by many, they need to appeal to people. It is not just stories that build a good game, what the game looks like, what the game sounds like, how the game challenges the player, and more, are all aspects which can contribute to making a good game. Unlike other types of applications and services created in the technology industry, there are no clear guidelines on how to make a good, appealing game.

This thesis aims to analyse why people enjoy playing the game Hades. As not every aspect of a game can be objectively measured in how great it is, a method which allowed for some interpretation was needed. It was decided that a thematic analysis would be best suitable to find what people, in general, consider to be great about the game. Based on the result of the thematic analysis, a set of guidelines for game design were constructed, and a *demo* of a game was constructed as well to illustrate them. This thesis will first present the relevant theories and information to the reader, before explaining how the study was done. After presenting the result, the validity of it is discussed, as well as which elements Hades shares with other successful games.

### 1.1 Background

Studies and books have been written with focus on creating successful educational games, or with focus on one specific aspect of video games such as music [7], storytelling [8], visuals, emotions [9], and more. While there are some articles about general important aspects [10], not many have published papers where the authors first analyse an already successful game in order to create something themselves, in the academic sphere. As video games is a multibillion-euro industry, identifying what makes for a successful game is of interest.

Something several modern games do, is take inspiration from old stories, myths and legends that are already familiar and cherished by many. One of these recent games is Hades, created by Supergiant games, which presents a new retelling of Greek

myths and stories. The game is a so-called *roguelike*, in which the player plays as Zagreus, the son of the Greek god Hades, who is trying to fight his way out of the underworld. Hades has received numerous awards [11] and could therefore be considered a successful game, and has also seemingly drawn in a broader audience than many other roguelike games.

## 1.2 Purpose

This project aims to concretize specific factors and elements in games that make players enjoy them. This is done by analysing what people have written about Hades. Specifically, the written texts that will be looked at are reviews published to various sites. Hades has been generally praised by reviewers, received several Game of the Year awards [11], and therefore it makes for a suitable subject to study to find certain factors that make games great. In order to analyse qualitative data from the reviews, a thematic analysis will be performed. The aim is to find common themes, ideas and thoughts from a multitude of different writers and publications. The goal of the analysis is to extract a set of guidelines from it; guidelines that can serve as a foundation for the development of new games. These guidelines will still be subjective and all of them will not be relevant for all different types of games. A demo will also be made in order to test how the guidelines could be used in practice.

## 1.3 Scope

For the analysis there had to be some limitations on the amount of data that could be processed for the scope of the project. This was so that the data could reasonably be analysed several times throughout the iterative process of the analysis in the limited amount of time allotted for the project.

When it comes to the creation of the demo, the focus will be on creating a proof of concept, containing the most important aspects found in the analysis guidelines. It is not expected that the demo will reach far beyond the stage of a paper prototype or bare bones digital demo.

# 2

## Context

This chapter will describe what gameplay loops are, the game Hades, as well as other relevant games. Because of the approach and the topic of the report, games are to be viewed in the same manner as other pieces of literature, such as books, articles and similar. In order to better understand the rest of the report, it is necessary to know and understand Hades's story and some of its underlying mechanics. Because other games will be compared to Hades in later chapters, it is necessary to also describe those games in detail.

There are multiple reasons as to why Hades was chosen as the game to research. The first being that it was considered by many to be the game of the year in 2020, providing motivation that it is relevant in the discussion of what makes a game great. The second being that it is a relatively new game, and thirdly that it is a so called indie game instead of a AAA game. Indie stemming from the word independent and meaning that the game was developed by a relatively small game studio, as compared to AAA games, which generally are developed by large companies with much larger budgets and resources available. Because AAA games come from relatively larger, already well-known companies, these games have an advantage compared to indie games, making a successful indie game more interesting to study. While there are many other games that could be interesting to research for other reasons, these three factors make Hades in particular more interesting.

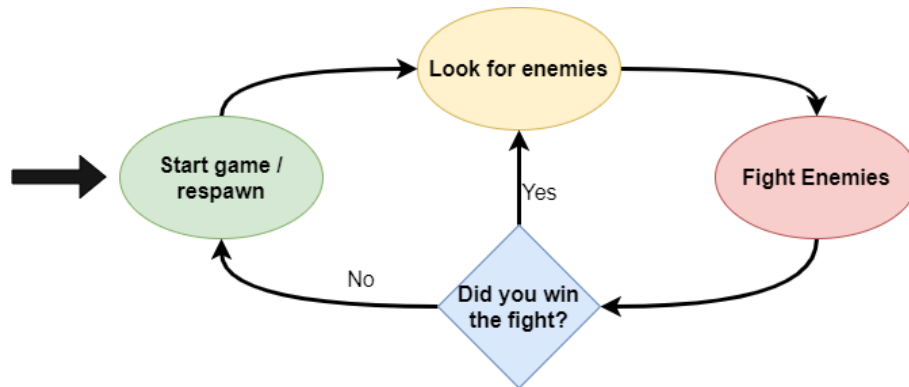
### 2.1 Gameplay loops

A gameplay loop describes the overall flow of a game. Players go through gameplay loops over and over again and that is in essence the game. It may sound repetitive and but a good gameplay loop should not be noticed by the player. Designing games around enjoyable gameplay loops is a perfectly acceptable way to create games. Working with some core gameplay loops and tweaking them keeps the design process focused and streamlined [12].

For example, in Pokémon, players run around in the world, encounter pokémon, battle it and either try to capture it or beat it, then they repeat the process. This is a rather short gameplay loop, an example of a longer one from the same game is winning gym badges. Gyms are the Pokémon equivalent of boss battles, players capture pokémon and train them for the gym. When a player beats a gym they get a badge and can move on to get the next one, repeating the loop.



Another example is competitive online shooters, the gameplay loop can look like the diagram in Figure 2.1.



**Figure 2.1:** A traditional gameplay loop in a competitive online shooter. Different modes changes / adds stages to the loop of course.

Hades uses gameplay loops in a interesting way not only for combat but also to deliver its story. This will be explored further in Section 2.2.

## 2.2 Hades

Developed by Supergiant Games, Hades is a game described by themselves as “a rogue-like *dungeon crawler* in which you defy the god of the underworld as you hack and slash your way out of the Underworld of Greek myth.” [13]. The game was officially released in 2020 on a number of platforms, but was available for *early access* from 2018. It has been positively received by both users and critics, receiving universal acclaim according to the review site Metacritic [14], [15]. The game been nominated for a considerable number of awards, and has, according to Supergiants own website, [13] won over 50 game of the year awards.

The game takes place in the depths of the Greek underworld, the place where souls end up after death. It features a number of well-known characters from Greek mythology, and especially those surrounding the concept of death, or otherwise related to the underworld or Hades.

The player plays as Zagreus, the son of Hades, whose goal is to escape the underworld and his father, and get to the surface. In order to escape, he must battle through various ever-changing areas, filled with monsters of different kinds. He has the help of the gods of Olympus, as well as some friends he has in the underworld. Zagreus can be seen in Figure 2.2, which depicts the game’s start screen.

The game consists of two gameplay loops. The inner loop consists of Zagreus entering a chamber, clearing it by killing all monsters and thereafter entering the next chamber. After repeating this loop x number of times the player will either



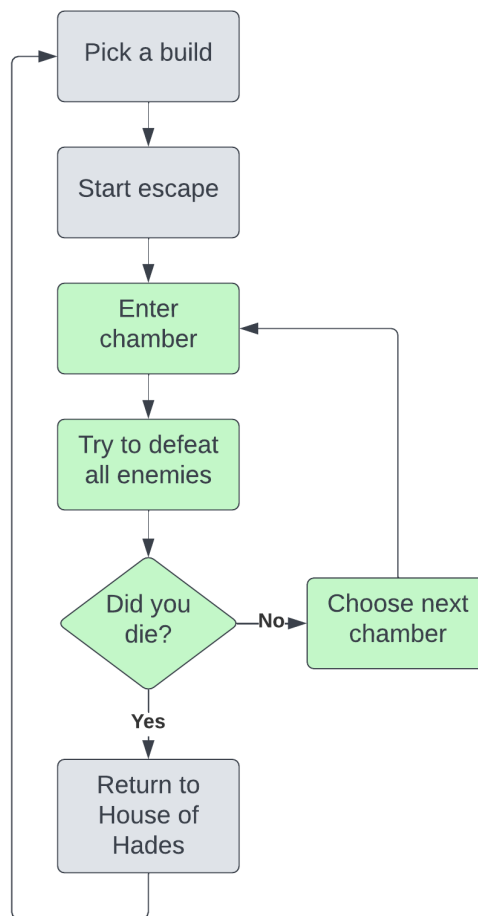
Figure 2.2: Starting screen of the game Hades.

be defeated or escape the underworld. Both result in the player being returned to Zagreus' home, the House of Hades. From the house of Hades a new *run*, a new escape attempt, can be started. This is the outer loop. A visual of the loops can be seen in Figure 2.3.

The House of Hades acts as a hub in the game, where Zagreus can interact with denizens of the underworld and, using currencies he obtains during his runs, buy permanent upgrades. By contrast, the Olympians can only be interacted with during escape attempts, where they provide the player with so called *Boons*, temporary upgrades that only last one run and help the player.

Hades has six weapons the player can choose from, five of which has to be unlocked first. There is a sword and combat gauntlets that focus on melee range attacks, a bow and primitive gun that provide ranged attacks and lastly a spear and shield which provide a hybrid of both melee and ranged attacks. Each weapon has a regular attack as well as one or two special attacks. The weapons also have several so called weapon aspects that change their appearance as well as their special attacks. Boons are another integral part of Hades. They act as upgrades for Zagreus different attacks, abilities and more. These boons are given by the various gods of Olympus as mentioned before and their powers are reflected in the boons they give out. Zeus's boons for example are based on lightning whilst Artemis's focus on critical damage, reflecting on her own precision.

*Keepsakes* are given to Zagreus by other characters he meets in exchange for a bottle of nectar. These keepsakes have different effects, for example they can ensure that your next boon is from a specific god or increase damage when striking foes from behind. Something that certain characters give Zagreus when their relationship is deep enough is a companion. They give the player access to a form of summon of that specific character that will help you clear rooms. In Hades there are also several currencies, darkness for example is one that lets you purchase permanent upgrades.



**Figure 2.3:** Hades consists of two game loops. The inner loop is marked with green, and the outer with gray. The inner loop is repeated until the player dies and is forcibly returned to the House of Hades where they can prepare for a new escape attempt.

## 2.3 Binding of Isaac

The Binding of Isaac (BoI) is another roguelike game, which was developed by Edmund McMillen and Florian Himsl. The game was released in September 2011. It has since sold over two million copies, had both follow up games and additional downloadable content (*DLC*) and is still being played as well as relevant more than 10 years after its original release. The game is also claimed to have influenced the re-popularization of the roguelike genre in recent times [16]. In this report BoI will not only refer to the first game, but also the games following the original in the series as well as all corresponding DLC.

The game is based on the religious story with the same name, with the main character being a crying child called Isaac. Isaac discovers that his mother is plotting to kill him, and attempts to escape to save himself. During the escape he encounters



Figure 2.4: Startscreen of The Binding of Isaac.

various enemies, some more realistic like spiders and flies, other less realistic like balls of guts or laser shooting eyeballs. In order to defeat these enemies Isaac cries, shooting his tears like bullets, as seen in Figure 2.5. Moving from room to room he might find upgrades which can affect the way he attacks, his health, certain status variables or other aspects. If Isaac loses all of his health, he dies, and the player is brought back to the title screen.



Figure 2.5: Isaac shooting tears.

The game loop is similar to the one of Hades, the biggest difference being the layout of the rooms and the loss of progression. In Hades the player always move to a

new chamber within a run, while in BoI the player is allowed to visit old rooms on the same floor over and over. The only thing kept between each run in BoI is the overall progress in unlocking new areas, upgrades, and playable characters. The player starts over from the beginning with each run, but as they continue to play the game more alternatives for future runs are unlocked.

## 2.4 The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild

The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild (BotW) was released in 2017 by Nintendo [17], and has since sold over 25 million copies [18]. Like Hades, BotW has been nominated and won a number of game awards, and could therefore, like Hades, be considered a successful game.



**Figure 2.6:** Startscreen of The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild.

As BotW is not a roguelike it lacks the type of game loop found in Hades. BotW is instead an *open world* adventure game, with much focus on player agency. Like the previous games from The Legend of Zelda series, the main character is a young man called Link who can be seen in Figure 2.6. The game starts with Link waking up in a dark cavern to a voice telling him to open his eyes. Upon exiting the cavern the player is introduced to the world, and specifically the Great Plateau where many of the game mechanics are first presented. Here the player can pick up weapons, fight against monsters, solve puzzles and more. Until certain criteria are fulfilled, the player can not leave this place, but afterwards the player is free to explore and roam through out the world as they please. While the end goal of the game is to defeat Ganon, the main villain in many of the Zelda games, there are many other goals to pursue as well.

## 2.5 Have a Nice Death

Have a Nice Death (HaND) is a roguelike that was released in early access on steam the 8th of March 2022 [19]. It is developed by Magic Design Studios and published by Gearbox Publishing. HaND is a fast-paced action game with a striking art-style similar to Hades.



**Figure 2.7:** Startscreen of Have a Nice Death.

In HaND you play as Death, the CEO of Death INC, who has been stuck with paperwork for such a long time that some employees have started misbehaving, causing the company to be in a bad state. Paperwork makes Death miserable, and in the game you go on a journey to restore Death INC to its former glory. Playing through levels of Death INC, upgrading weapons and getting random power ups, the player hacks and slashes and dashes their way forward through the roster of enemies and bosses. The weapon system consists of a main attack and two magical abilities unlocked while playing.

Mechanically, Have a Nice Death is similar to its predecessors in the roguelike genre. This can, among other examples, be seen in the incorporation of permanent death and replaying the same levels. Like in the Binding of Isaac (Section 2.3) the player can figure out what different upgrades do by equipping them in the game which causes the player to improve from run to run. If a player finds more than one, they need to pick and choose. This is another way the game makes each run unique. It is also an element that can be found in Hades. A lot of analogies can be drawn from between the games, some of them are discussed in Section 6.1.3.

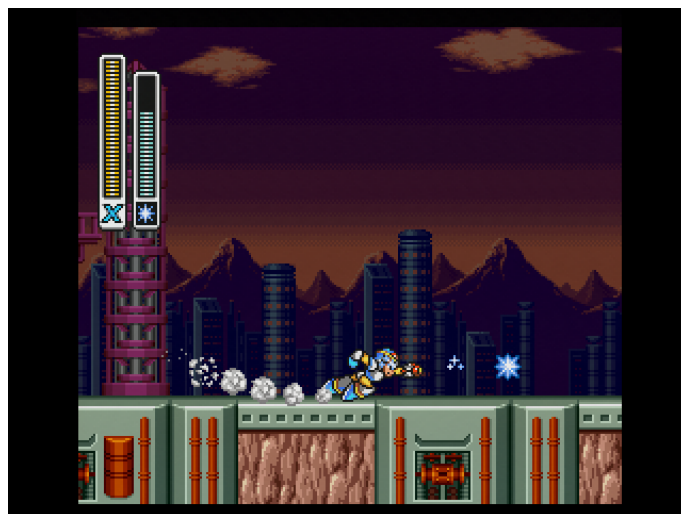
## 2.6 Mega Man X

Mega Man X (MMX) was released for the SNES in 1993, and while it did not receive any Game of the Year-awards, it was still a commercial success [20] and holds critical acclaim [21]. The game is an action platformer, focusing on running and gunning. The player charges their way through the games's different levels and fends off bosses, called Mavericks, and acquires their weapons after defeating them. The idea is quite simple and the main focus is the action-packed gameplay.



**Figure 2.8:** Mega Man X Title Screen

Mega Man X is the tenth game in the Mega Man series and serves as a sequel to the original series. Much like its 8-bit predecessors on the NES, the game features vivid pixel art and a high-intensity soundtrack. Similar to Zagreus, the protagonist X starts his journey with nothing but simplest of weapons, but eventually the player learns how to use the game's dash mechanic and also how to unlock powerful upgrades and weapons.



**Figure 2.9:** The protagonist X dashing while using the Shotgun Ice weapon

# 3

## Theory

This section will present theoretical frameworks used throughout the report. It will start with explaining the MDA-framework which is a game design framework, and then moves on to grounded theory and thematic analysis. Both grounded theory and thematic analysis were used as methods. After this, the section describes paper prototyping.

### 3.1 MDA-framework

MDA stands for Mechanics, Dynamics and Aesthetics [22] and is a widely used game design framework. It was introduced by Hunicke et al. as a way to offer a common frame of reference for game development, game criticism and game research. The framework offers common way to decompose a game, thereby offering a joint understanding and abstraction of the game. As people in the gaming industry come from different roles and academic backgrounds this helps facilitate communication and understanding, especially in areas outside a person's normal expertise. Mechanics, Dynamics and Aesthetics are by Hunicke et al. defined as:

**Mechanics** describes the particular components of the game, at the level of data representation and algorithms.

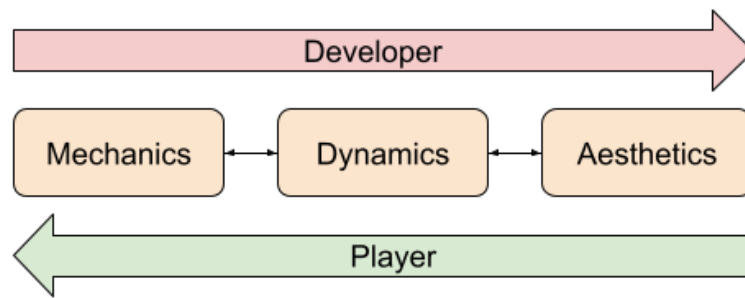
**Dynamics** describes the run-time behaviour of the mechanics acting on player inputs and each others' outputs over time.

**Aesthetics** describes the desirable emotional responses evoked in the player, when she interacts with the game system.

There are several different aesthetics, but Hunicke et al. give eight examples: sensation, fantasy, narrative, challenge, fellowship, discovery, expression and submission.

The framework can be used from both a designers and a players perspective, as illustrated in Figure 3.1. From a designers perspective mechanics produce dynamics which in turn give rise to aesthetics. It can also be described as rules that produce a system which then produce a fun experience for the player. An example would be how a shooter game could have the mechanics weapons and covers. This could lead to the dynamics camping, meaning staying in the same place waiting for enemies to pass by, and sniping, which could lead to the aesthetic challenge. If looking at a game from the players point of view on the other hand the player experience several





**Figure 3.1:** Visual description of the MDA-framework. The figure illustrates how the developer starts at the mechanics end of the framework, while a player starts at the aesthetic end.

different aesthetics that arises from different observable dynamics, that in turn stem from the game's mechanics.

While well established, the MDA-framework has received criticism. Walk et al. summarise the criticism as too much focus on mechanics while neglecting other aspects of game design and not being suited for all types of game design [23]. It was brought up that the MDA-framework fits functionality-oriented game design better than experience-oriented game design. In particular, there were no guidelines provided for designing a narrative. It is also unclear where a narrative fits within the framework. They comment that narrative components partly but not fully belong to mechanics, but not to dynamics or aesthetic, thereby leaving many narrative components unclassified.

## 3.2 Grounded theory

Grounded theory is a method evaluating qualitative data to produce a theory based on what can be observed in the data. In other words, the researcher need not make a literary analysis within her field of study before starting, and can form insights from the results of the analysis of the data and the theory it produces, instead of trying to fit the result to an already existing theory. The process is inductive as the researcher starts with an open question they would like a theory to answer, compared to a traditional deductive approach, where a hypothesis is either proved or disproved [24]. While working with a hypothesis may lead to a research bias or tunnel vision, grounded theory adapts readily and is better at determining what actually happens [25].

The Grounded Theory method was formally developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 within the field of sociology. Since then it has spread widely and is now used within a large variety of fields when using qualitative data. These includes but are not limited to accounting, education, business management and game studies [26] [27]. The method is considered appropriate to use when there is no existing theory,

and has the benefits that the findings are closely tied to the data and thus accurately represent real world conditions. It was also developed to obtain the strengths of quantitative research, namely its systematic approach, logic, and rigour [28].

Glaser and Strauss outlined three main steps to produce a theory: Data collection, data analysis and theory development. The process of data analysis can be further split into the process of coding and grouping codes into categories. Coding refers to breaking down written data into excerpts and collecting similar excerpts under a joint code. These codes are then grouped into categories that form a coherent concept, from which a theory can be formed. The process is iterative, and is repeated until theoretical saturation is reached.

Glaser and Strauss eventually went separate ways in their interpretation of their initial work which led to two different methods, the Glaserian and Straussian method, where the main difference between them lies in perception of the procedures used in the data analysis process [28]. Yet another version arose from Charmaz's critique of Glaser's version, leading to what is known as Constructivist Grounded Theory [29]. Constructivist Grounded Theory differs in that the user is encouraged to explore related literature before and during the study, as long as the researcher remains neutral towards it. That is, it takes the context of the data into account. It should be noted that despite their differences, all versions share the same main steps outlined earlier in this section.

Salisbury and Cole argue that all three versions of grounded theory methodology are relevant within games studies, and that which method should be chosen depends on what type of result the researcher wants to achieve. They further argue that games studies benefit from using grounded theory since it is a nascent area of academia, and thus has much to gain from the forming of new theories [27]. Grounded theory can do this by providing a universal methodical framework that can structure exploratory projects.

Among other examples, Salisbury and Cole point out that grounded theory methodology was used in Fabricatore et al.'s model of playability, where it was asked what players want in action video games, and a qualitative model was produced based on the players' opinions. They executed the study by collecting qualitative data during and after play sessions, that was then broken down and conceptualised and categorised. These categories were described and the relationship between the categories were analysed before the categories themselves were analysed for player preferences. From this, a set of playability design guidelines and recommendations were extracted [30].

### **3.3 Thematic analysis**

Thematic analysis is a method of evaluating qualitative data. Braun and Clark describes it as a flexible method applied to a set of texts to find common themes and patterns among them [31]. Thematic analysis is considered a good method to

find out peoples opinions, knowledge or experiences, but is a subjective method that depend on the researcher's judgement.

When working with thematic analysis a text is referred to as a data item, while all texts included in the analysis is referred to as a dataset. From the data items the researcher generates codes - a code being a very short description of a part of the text, a data extract, expressing something that is interesting to the analysis. These codes are then sorted and combined into themes that express a common idea, that is then used to write analysis. Braun and Clark outline six steps in their description of the method, though they note it is an iterative process, where steps can and often should be repeated multiple times. The steps are as follows:

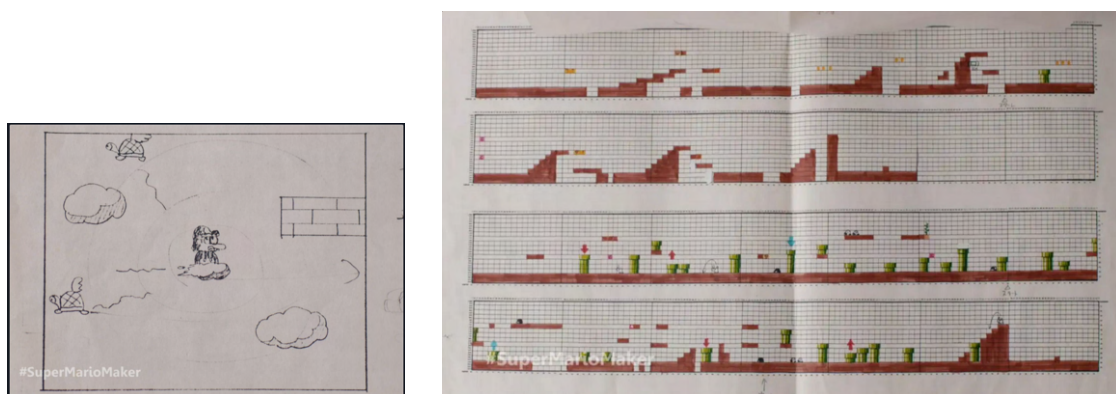
- 1. Familiarising yourself with your data:** To repeatedly read and immerse oneself in the data in an active and analytic way.
- 2. Generating initial codes:** Systemically work through the entire dataset, spending equal amounts of time on each data item. Create appropriate codes for all interesting and relevant data extracts and mark the extracts with the relevant code. One data extract can have multiple codes.
- 3. Searching for themes:** Sort all codes into potential themes, and sort all data extracts belonging to that code into the theme. Visual aids such as mind-maps are encouraged to be used to give a better overview of how potential themes, subthemes and codes relate to each other. These are called candidate themes, and the resulting map is called a thematic map.
- 4. Reviewing themes:** This step has two levels. On the first level the candidate themes are reviewed on a data extract level, to ensure all extracts and codes form a cohesive theme. Candidate themes might be adjusted, combined or broken up. Once this is done, the researcher can move to the second level where the entire candidate thematic map is reviewed to see if it accurately reflects the dataset.
- 5. Defining and naming themes:** Identifying which aspect of the data the theme capture, as well as the essence of each theme. This includes both what a theme or subtheme is and what it is not.
- 6. Producing the report:** Telling the story of the data within and across themes in such a way that the reader understands the validity of the analysis as well as its merit.

When using thematic analysis either an inductive or a deductive approach can be used. When using an inductive approach the themes are chosen based on the data, and the generated codes. A deductive approach on the other hand is used when there is a predetermined set of themes that can be expected to be found based on prior knowledge, and these themes are looked for in the data [32].

### 3.4 Paper prototyping

Paper prototyping is a common practice in game design. It is used to plot out basic elements and test early ideas before creating them in a game engine. It is also helpful to find and resolve early problem, especially when implementing new and creative ideas. Further more, paper prototypes are easy to make without much technical skill such as programming or knowledge of a particular game engine [33]. This means that creators are able to quickly create prototypes that can be changed. Since they are made quickly, creators are often less attached to them which also makes it easier to change and discard prototypes. This practice in whole saves creators both time and effort.

One example of a game that used paper prototyping in early development stages is Super Mario for the NES, Nintendos first videogame console. Super Mario have some stages drawn on graph paper. Drawing can be seen in Figure 3.2 and was found in a article qz.com [34].



(a) Mario on a cloud.

(b) Mario Level drawn pixel by pixel.

**Figure 3.2:** Drawings of Super Mario level. Promotion for Mario Maker

Paper prototyping in game design is a powerful and well researched tool that should be used when creating and testing designs in the pre-production stage of any game development project. Testing, evaluating and validating the prototype is easily done with a paper prototype. It's not a one to one model of a digital version of a game and this should be taken into consideration. However it's still a versatile tool to guide the creative process of game design [35].



# 4

## Method

The project was conducted in two main parts: an analysis of the game Hades and a prototype of a game based on the findings of the analysis. Constructivist grounded theory was used as the overarching method to produce a set of guidelines of what makes up a good game, and as part of this process a thematic analysis of written reviews of Hades were conducted. This chapter will describe in depth how both parts, the analysis and the game prototype, of the project were performed by the group.

### 4.1 Thematic analysis

A thematic analysis was performed as a part of this thesis on written reviews of the game Hades to explore how it captured audiences. A description of how thematic analysis function can be found in section 3.3. The method was chosen due to its flexibility and suitability for handling subjective and qualitative data. This section will first describe how the dataset was chosen, and then explain how the method thematic analysis was applied in this instance.

#### 4.1.1 Data selection and criteria

As explained in section 1.3, the data for the thematic analysis consists of written reviews of Hades. Before collecting data for the analysis, criteria for valid data were constructed. Two different categories of reviews were analysed: Professionally written reviews for publications or similar mediums and amateur reviews written by single individuals, posted on review boards.

The decision to only look at written reviews was made to save time, as any video footage would need to be transcribed. This does narrow down the potential data, which is not necessarily bad from a time perspective. The decision does come with the downside of missing out on reviews on YouTube and other video platforms. YouTube did have a vast amount of reviews, ranging from amateur to professional, as well as what could on our scale be called semi-professional reviews, where the reviewer did make their living from publishing reviews but were not tied to a publication or similar. That said, it was decided that the opinions found in video reviews most likely could be found in written reviews as well, and that the current selection offered a wide enough spectrum.

As for the decision to look at both professional and amateur reviews, the idea was to look at a broader spectrum than what one category alone could offer. Amateur reviews show what the average player picked up as good and important, but were usually very short and do not always motivate their opinions. Professional reviews tended to be longer and more elaborate, but also spent time explaining to the reader how the game works. Often this meant long paragraphs about the fighting mechanics of the game, where opinions and facts were mixed. This can be seen in the result of the thematic analysis, see section 5.1.

To limit the dataset to a manageable scope, 10 professionally written reviews were chosen. These were chosen based on the quality of the review and to reflect the political spectrum. Twitter was used to investigate where authors and publications fell on the political spectrum. Talk about politics, especially in relation to video games, placed them on the left side, while no talk about politics or talk about how politics do not belong in video games placed them to the right. For the quality criteria the length of the review, how well-known the publisher was and how well the reviewer motivated their opinions was considered. If the same publisher had several reviews for different consoles only one of them was used, and the parts talking about console specific performance were excluded since that was outside the scope of the analysis. This also was done to broaden the dataset, as it was assumed that authors writing for the same publication would share some views. The final selection was:

- Epilogue Gaming[36]
- Eurogamer[37]
- Gamespot[38]
- IGN[39]
- Kotaku[40]
- PC Gamer[41]
- Polygon[42]
- The Guardian[43]
- The Sixth Axis[44]
- The Telegraph[45]

As for the amateur reviews 38 were chosen in total, 15 from Metacritic and 23 from Steam. Metacritic and Steam both have review board functions, making them suitable for collecting data. Both sites were used since even though Steam has a larger user base it is PC-exclusive, while Metacritic gathers reviews from all available consoles. Both sites are popular and prevalent within gaming discourse. To ensure the relevance and seriousness of the reviews several criteria were agreed on. The criteria were as follows: the reviews needed to be written in a language that the group members are proficient in, which in practice meant Swedish or English. Reviews that scored the game 0/5 or 0/10 were removed, since they were not considered serious. This is because these reviews offered little to no interesting commentary. To further ensure the seriousness of the review it was agreed that the review should be at least three sentences long and should contain the writers opinions and not only facts. Since many negative reviews also express positive opinions about the game

it was decided to look at both positive and negative reviews. Metacritic and Steam function differently, and therefore each site had some unique criteria.

For Metacritic specifically, ten positive reviews were chosen as well as four with a mixed score and one with a negative score. The distribution of positive, mixed and negative reviews was chosen before collecting the data to reflect the overall positive response the game has received. The reviews were chosen from the tab "User reviews". Metacritic displays a score of the review presented in the format "X of Y users found this helpful". The reviews with the highest X number and that more than 50% of users had found helpful were chosen, from across all consoles. The reviews in our dataset can be found in Appendix D.2. The reviewers usernames have been removed to preserve their anonymity.

Steam reviews were chosen with the additional criteria that the reviewer should have played the game at least an hour. The reviews were sorted on by the criteria "Most helpful" and nine reviews representing both positive and negative opinions were chosen. In addition to this, one sentence reviews that only expressed an opinion about one specific game element were considered as well if the opinion was shared by several other similar reviews. All reviews can be found in Appendix D.1. The usernames have been removed to preserve the the users anonymity.

### 4.1.2 The coding process

Initially an inductive approach was used to code the data, but it was soon noticed that largely the same themes appeared in most of the reviews. The approach was thus changed to a deductive one, since it was found to be more efficient. This hybrid approach was used to code the data that was mentioned in section 4.1.1.

The reviews were coded with the help of Google Docs by copying and pasting a review into a new document. First the group coded one specific review separately to then go through all the emerging codes together. This was done to ensure all were familiar with the process and to set a standard on how the rest of the remaining reviews should be coded. This also led to a primary set of codes and themes used to code the remaining reviews. A separate document was created, containing all preliminary codes sorted under preliminary themes, where each theme had its own colour, representing all codes under that theme. An early version of these themes and codes can be found in Figure 4.2. This was done because of the limited selection of light colours available to mark text with in Google Docs. Some codes that proved especially prevalent were given their own colour, but that was the exception, not the rule. As more reviews were coded, new codes were added to the code document when deemed necessary. All relevant text excerpt were marked with their theme colour in the review document, and were then iteratively reviewed as more codes were added or changed place. One group member was in charge of the initial coding of each review. These coded reviews were then peer reviewed, often leading to changes. The coding was considered finished after every review had been peer reviewed, and new codes were no longer added to the document containing all codes and themes. An



## 4. Method

example of a paragraph that has been fully coded in given in Figure 4.1. These steps correspond to step two in the Braun and Clark method, see section 3.3.

Unusually for the sub genre there's plot and dialogue to spare, the large cast of classical characters delivering chunks of mythologically accurate exposition between (and often during) runs via an astonishing amount of nearly always entertaining dialogue. It's a welcome amuse bouche before the main courses of mayhem to come and helps establish Hades not just as a superior roguelike, but also a superb game in its own right.

**Figure 4.1:** Excerpt from the coded Hades review from The Guardian. Each colour represents either a theme or a code. Maroon = code:intertwining of story and game, pink = code:good characters, peach = code:mythology, cyan = code:praise.

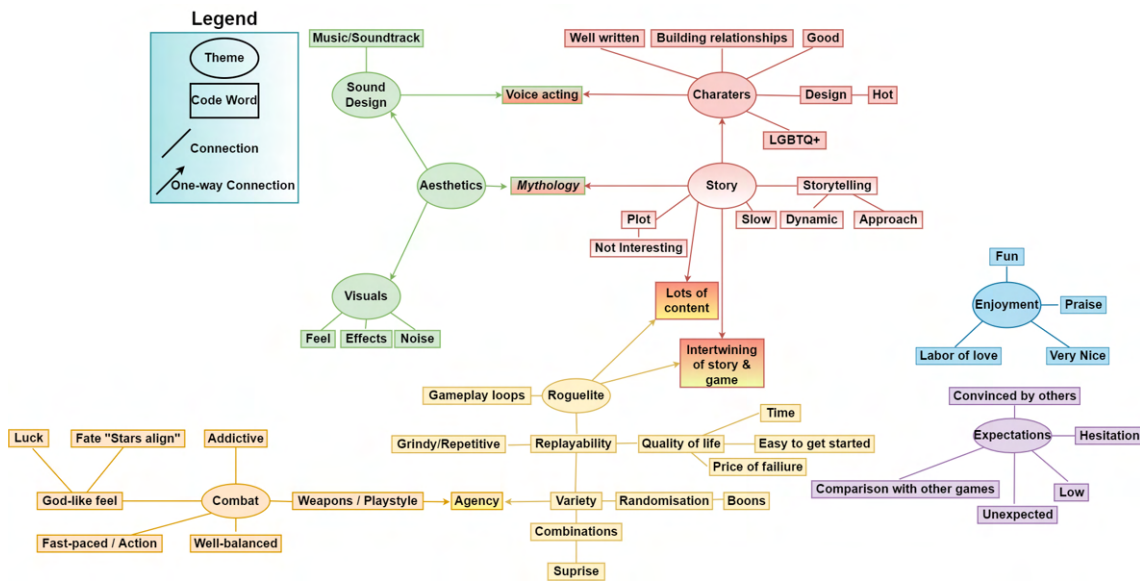


**Figure 4.2:** Codes grouped under preliminary themes. These themes and codes changed as the process moved forward. Please note that the colours are arbitrary in this figure.

### 4.1.3 Organising themes

Several preliminary themes had been organised during the coding process to simplify it, as seen in section 4.1.2. These themes existed mostly as a way to facilitate and ease the coding process and were therefore now broken back up into codes. All codes were written down in random order on a blackboard, and through discussion then organised back into themes without considering which preliminary themes they originated from. These themes were named after colours, to avoid conventional grouping and encourage new combinations and out of the box thinking. This was followed by organising all the coded entries under their new themes to see if they

matched and in fact made a coherent theme. After some adjustments, the themes were organised into a thematic map. An early iteration of this map can be found in Figure 4.3. Here, some themes were removed or combined. This was done by looking at the connected text excerpts and codes, and evaluating how well the theme represented them. This process was cycled through several times before arriving at the final thematic map with its themes and subthemes. A short definition of each theme was written up to ensure there existed a unified interpretation of the theme. This cycle corresponds to step three through five in the Brown and Clark method, see section 3.3. The results of this process can be found in section 5.1.



**Figure 4.3:** An early iteration of the thematic map. The map shows both themes and codes. Many of these would be reorganised or removed in the final version found in figure 5.1.

## 4.2 Guidelines

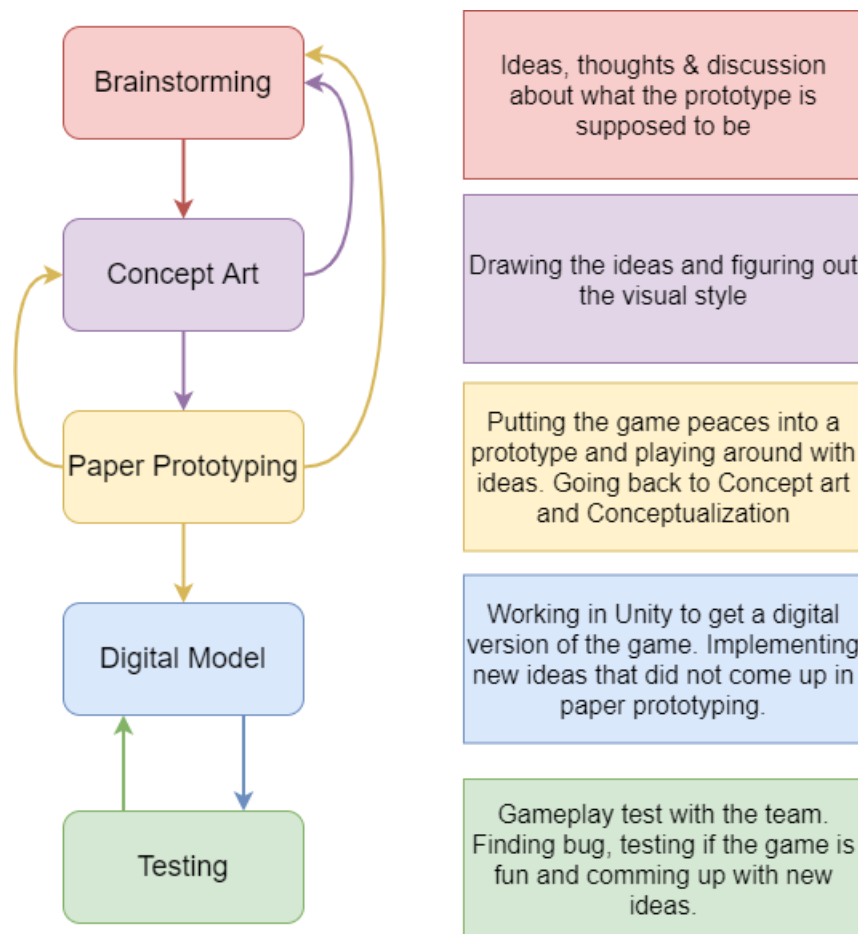
After the thematic analysis was finished, the results were then discussed to find what each theme contributed to the game on a more abstract level. The result was a list of guidelines that, while derived from the thematic analysis of Hades, were intended to be applied separately from Hades, as a general tool for game development.

The guidelines came to be by referencing the thematic map as well as looking back at the data set, the reviews. This was done to see more precisely what elements in the game itself built up the themes. The guidelines were written down after a thorough discussion, and were continuously peer-reviewed and modified. Some were directly translated from the themes whilst others required a revisit to the data set. The guidelines were to have a clear instructive title as well as a description going into more detail on what the guideline entailed and how to achieve it. This was done for extra clarity. Several examples, from Hades and some other select games chosen by the writers, were also included to showcase the guidelines in action. See

Section 5.2 for the guidelines accompanied by one example. See Appendix A for the guidelines with multiple examples.

### 4.3 Game concept development

The purpose of the game concept is to provide a proof of concept based on the guidelines that resulted from the analysis. This section will cover the process of how that concept and our demo was developed. Developing a concept is an iterative process, the workflow for this project is visualised in Figure 4.4.



**Figure 4.4:** The workflow of creating the a game concept

#### 4.3.1 From guidelines to demo

After the guidelines were created, a demo was created based on these. The purpose of the demo was to see if the guidelines would be helpful when developing a game, and if using these guidelines would give the developed game a similar response in players as Hades. Because of the lack of time, the demo was not finished, nor was it tested by anyone outside of the project. When creating a demo based on the guidelines, the plan was to test if the guidelines could provide direction in the game

making process and if the guidelines were specific enough to recreate the themes found in the thematic analysis.

### 4.3.2 Brainstorming

Before deciding on a concept, some general ideas about what the game should and should not have were listed. One example was what perspective the player views the game from. Another example was what types of gameplay should be included, such as puzzles, fighting, and more. Because story was something that was found to be important for a game, one thought when deciding on potential concepts was to base the game on already existing and somewhat well-known stories. Below is the list of suggested topics to base the game concept on or draw inspiration from:

- Dracula or Nosferatu
- Stories written by the Grimm Brothers
- Perspective of a dog
- Mythology (Nordic, Egyptian)
- Dungeons and dragons
- Generic high fantasy

After these suggestions were listed, two ideas were discussed further, a game based on Nordic mythology, and a game based on the perspective of a dog. Sketching and paper prototyping, as well as concept art was made for both ideas.

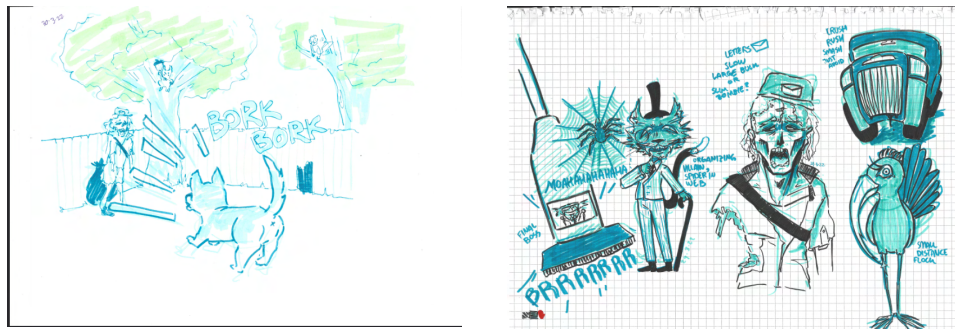
### 4.3.3 Paper prototyping

After brainstorming a paper prototype was designed. The aim of a paper prototype was to visualize and test game concepts and ideas in a way that is fast, light on resources and easy to revert and change. This prototype was comprised of paper drawings representing levels, concept art of characters and toys representing game objects and the player. The prototype was not playable, this was because the digital demo was always intended to be played in real time and not turn based as the prototype would have been. The focus in this stage was to determine the level design, gameplay loops and backstory. Early level designs can be seen in figure 4.6a. Decisions that were carried over to the demo like, small levels, a fixed camera and boss battles 4.6b shows that this way of working saves time and extends brainstorming into the pre-development stages of the game design process.

### 4.3.4 Models

In order to get a more precise feel of the games aesthetic and give the group more creative control, it was decided that new models should be created.

While there are programs that can be used to create models digitally, it was more time efficient to create some of the models by hand using clay, since the group lacked proficiency in those programs. These models were used in the paper prototype stage,



(a) Concept art of a dog fighting with a mailman.

(b) Concept art of things a dog might find scary.



(c) Drawing of dogs

**Figure 4.5:** Concept art

but were also made with the intention to be scanned and translated into digital files. Images of the clay figures can be seen in Figure 4.7, Figure 4.8, and also in Appendix C.

In order to transfer the clay model to a digital format, Polycam, which is a 3D scanning program for smartphones, was used [46]. The result can be seen in Figure 4.9. Attempts were made to increase the quality of the digital models by creating larger scaled models using different coloured clay which can be seen in Figure 4.10.



**Figure 4.9:** A 3D-scan of the sitting dog model.



**Figure 4.10:** Larger sitting dog model with blue clay.

The files created in Polycam were edited in Blender [47], and then imported into Unity, which will be described in more detail in 4.3.5. A problem encountered was that the models that were imported to a digital format were not of the desired quality. Improving them further would require more time and resources than what was available.

### 4.3.5 Unity

Unity is a game engine which can be used to develop games for multiple platforms such as mobile and computers [48]. This game engine has been used to develop games like Ori And The Blind Forest [49], Cuphead [50], Among Us [51], and others. An official asset store exists where developers can browse and purchase assets for projects. There is a comparatively large user base of the software, which has led to a large amount of video tutorials and documentation being available [52].

As certain members of the group had some previous experience with the game engine it was decided that the demo should be developed using Unity. Some challenges were encountered, such as trying to create new 3D models and some members not having experience with the software. The issue of experience was partially solved by spending time watching tutorials and reading documentation regarding Unity Docs.

Because of the amount of time and resources available, most of the assets used in the demo were created by others outside of the project. Most came from the Unity asset store, a website where users of Unity can buy, download and import assets directly into Unity [53]. These assets would ideally be replaced by assets created by the group in order to make the demo seem more cohesive and better represent the aesthetic. The assets that are used however, have been picked with consideration and modified in order to minimize these issues. A list of the assets used can be found in Appendix B .

### 4.3.6 Digital Demo

After working with the paper prototype a digital demo was created in Unity, with assets from the Unity asset store and custom Blender assets [53]. The work with the digital demo continued to make use of the guidelines from the analysis. The demo game follows a similar genre and gameplay loop to Hades, a fast paced action game where the player goes through levels fighting enemies.

The amount of time left for the project at this stage limited the amount of work that could be put into the demo. Focus was put on introducing core elements which are characteristic of this type of game. For example, one enemy was designed and implemented to allow for combat to be implemented, but ideally more enemies should be added to increase variety.

The first thing that was created for the demo was a testing area with some terrain and a controllable character. From this, each new addition could be tested in the area in combination with the previous additions. At the beginning many placeholder elements were used, as new assets had not been created yet, and functionality needed

to be developed.

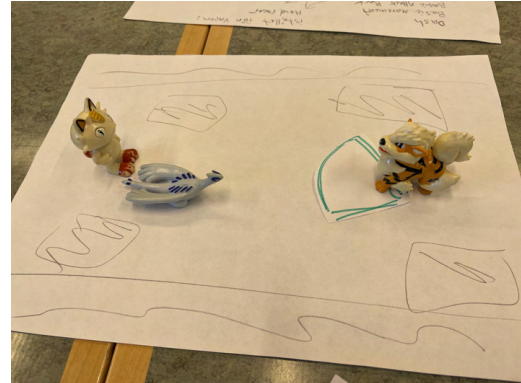
Core functionality takes time and effort to implement, as an example, to recreate the ideas from the paper prototype to have multiple stages necessitates a way to remember health points and stats between levels. These are important functions for the structure of the game but is not noticed by the players as "fun mechanics" or "nice audio/visual design".

Music, sound effects, and visuals, such as character models and environments, among other things, were added later, even though these are also important aspects in creating a cohesive demo. Things like menus and similar were also added later to make the demo more complete.

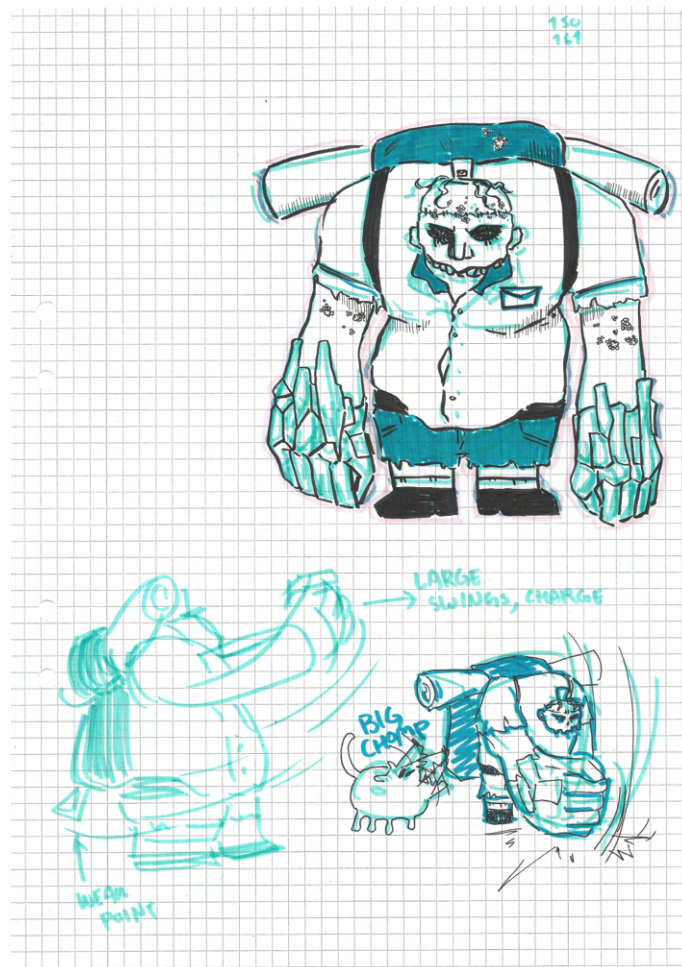
Creating a demo based on the guidelines was a test of the guidelines in practice. It's easy to write how things should work in theory without any regard of practical application, this is where the demo comes in. It should be noted that the purpose of the guidelines, which can be found in A, is not to be a step by step guide how to make games. Instead, they summarise the findings from the analysis, what makes Hades enjoyable to play according to the reviews. This means that choices about genre, gameplay style, and themes still has to be made. How the demo turned out can be found under Results in section 5.3.



(a) Paper prototype level concept depicting a level with a player an enemy and environmental details.



(b) Paper prototype of the last boss battle, Cat vs Dog.



(c) Mailman enemy, scary from a dogs perspective

**Figure 4.6:** Paper prototypes and concept art





(a) Model of sitting dog, front



(b) Model of sitting dog, side

**Figure 4.7:** Clay figure of a sitting dog. All models were planned to be used in the game demo.



(a) Model of squirrel head, side



(b) Model of squirrel head, front



(c) Unfinished model of squirrel



(d) Finished model of squirrel

**Figure 4.8:** Figure a and b shows a squirrel head made in clay. Figure c and d shows a full squirrel made in clay. All models were planned to be used in the game demo.



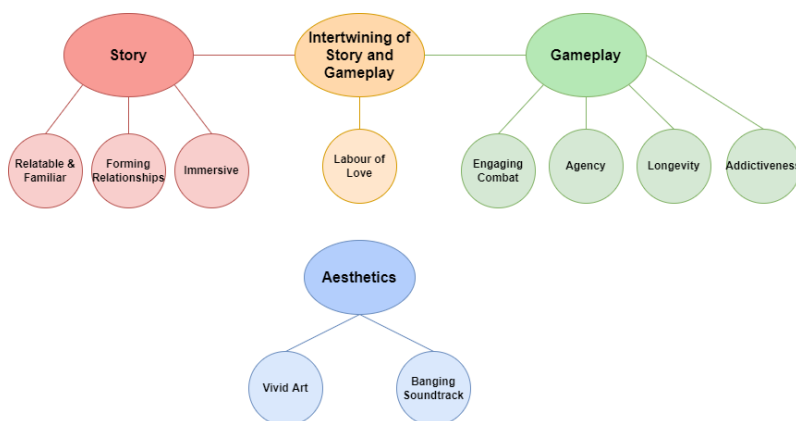
# 5

## Results

In the results chapter, three things are presented. Firstly, the final iteration of themes from the analysis, including both themes and subthemes, as well as a summary of what was seen in the texts regarding those themes. Secondly, the guidelines, which were based on the results of the thematic analysis. Thirdly, a description of the demo. Specifically, which aspects from Hades it tried to emulate and how the guidelines influenced the demo.

### 5.1 Themes

The thematic analysis of the Hades reviews resulted in four themes: *Intertwining of Story and Gameplay*, *Story*, *Gameplay* and *Aesthetics*. Each theme has one or several subthemes that further dive into the results. For example, the theme Story is made up of the subthemes *Relatable and Familiar*, *Forming Relationships*, and *Immersive*. An overview of the themes and subthemes and how they relate to each other can be found in Figure 5.1. Table 5.1 show the theme's and subtheme's sizes in percentages. Is important to note that Gameplay is over-represented when it comes to number of text extracts. This is because the professional reviews had a far larger combined word-count than the amateur reviews. The professional reviews spent a lot of those words explaining, in neither positive nor negative terms, how the game's mechanics works, which inflated the Gameplay theme. All code extracts belonging to their corresponding themes can be found in Appendix E.



**Figure 5.1:** The thematic map of the analysis. The three themes Story, Intertwining of Story and Gameplay, and Gameplay are interlinked, while Aesthetics is separate.

**Table 5.1:** Table shows the percentages of the number of extracts from the different themes. Gameplay is by far the largest theme, followed by Intertwining of Story and Gameplay, and Story, with Aesthetic being the smallest theme. The large size of the Gameplay theme stems from how the professional reviews spent a lot of time explaining how the game worked. Please note that since the fractions have been rounded to the closest integer, the percentages do not add up to 100.

Theme	Subtheme	%	%
Intertwining of Story and Gameplay		24	
	IoSaG		15
	Labour of Love		9
Story		20	
	Relatable and Familiar		3
	Forming Relationships		12
Gameplay	Immersive		5
		47	
	Engaging Combat		25
	Agency		6
	Longevity		9
Aesthetic	Addictiveness		8
		8	
	Vivid Art		6
	Banging Soundtrack		3

### 5.1.1 Intertwining of Story and Gameplay

While Intertwining of Story and Gameplay (IoSaG in Table 5.1) is not the largest theme from a percentage point of view, it is the most important one according to the authors of this thesis. This is because it both links the Story and Gameplay themes together, and encompasses what the analysis found was Hades unique strength, which is how the game’s roguelike structure supports and moulds with its story. This helps build the game into a cohesive experience, that is more than the sum of its parts. This was noted, and often explicitly stated. Gamespot described it as *“What sets Hades apart isn’t just that it’s a great roguelike with the kind of repeatable depth that makes it engrossing to play for hours, but also how it uses its structure to tell an ongoing story about family, secrets, and resolution.”* [38]. They note how the game’s structure as a roguelike enhances its storytelling. IGN came to a similar conclusion when they wrote: *“In the ancient Greek myth of Sisyphus, a poor soul is doomed to forever push a boulder uphill without rest. Each time he’d push it up, it would roll back down again and he’d have to start anew. But what if that Herculean climb uphill was actually awesome combat against a randomized variety of enemies as you fight your way out of Hell, with a wide range of godly powers that grow and combine in interesting ways as you progress?”* [39]. Here, IGN also noted how the roguelike structure is fitting for the Greek myth of Sisyphus, something that will be

further explained in Section 5.1.2.

Though not as explicitly stated in the reviews, it is not only Hades’s main story and structure that are tied together. Most, if not all of the games mechanics and dynamics fit this puzzle as well. For example the biomes that Zagreus travels through during his escape match those of the different sections in the Greek underworld. Further, the effect of the boons that upgrade Zagreus abilities are tied to the lore of that god, and the weapons are all present in Greek mythology as well.

The story and gameplay aspects are further explored in the themes Story (Section 5.1.2) and Gameplay (Section 5.1.3), whilst in this section it will also be presented how the reviews noted how Hades storytelling approach softened or even erased the players feelings of failure after dying. IGN put it as “*When I die in Dead Cells I want to quit, but in Hades the sting’s immediately removed because I get to chat with an embodiment of night and see what’s up with Orpheus. Then, back in the zone, I buy another round of upgrades and try again.*” [39]. In roguelike games, the player is returned to the start after dying, losing all their progress. Here, IGN notes that Hades removes the frustration of having to start over by offering new bits of story and deepening of relationships with other characters. They have, once again, used the merging of the game’s story and mechanics to better the player experience. An example of this can be seen in Figure 5.2.



**Figure 5.2:** Screenshot of Hypnos comforting the player after they died.

Intertwining of Story and Gameplay has one subtheme, called *Labour of Love*. This subtheme encompasses how the reviews noted how the game appears to have a high production value, which in turn appeared to originate from how not only all the game’s parts fit together and enhance one another, but also from how much attention and love seem to have gone into the game’s details and the game as a whole. This praise appeared both in short statements like “*Best of the Genre since The Binding of Isaac.*” and “*All in all a pretty unique and masterful turn on a not-so-much-loved genre. Well done Supergiant Games.*”, written by two Metacritic users (m2 and m7 respectively, see Appendix D.2), and in longer statements that

summed up what was good about the game. This can for example be found in IGN’s review, where they wrote “*Hades is a one-of-a-kind rogue-lite that sets the bar for creatively combining wildly different genres together and using their strengths to complement each other in unexpected ways. Its blend of satisfying, twitch-based action with countless modifiers to build replayability, dating simulator-esque character interactions, and turning failure into a thing you look forward to as a means of progressing the story coalesce to an experience that is more than the sum of its parts.*” [39].

### 5.1.2 Story

Hades features a main story and several subplots related to different characters that the player can choose to engage with. The main story explores why Zagreus is running away from home, and spans at least ten runs, though often more than twice that, depending on the players skill level. Subplots, on the other hand, are more or less endless. These were found to be an important part of many players’ experience. Not only by engaging the player, but also by giving the game genre transcending characteristics. This theme was divided into the subthemes *Relatable and Familiar*, *Forming Relationships*, and *Immersive*.

The subtheme *Relatable and Familiar* discuss both how the use of Greek mythology builds on the players’ already existing knowledge and interests, and how some characters and arcs allow the player to relate to them. There is also a large overlap between these categories, since Greek mythology features a lot of relatable themes, such as coming-of-age and father-son relations.

Greek mythology was talked about in reviews as a story description, a justification for certain dynamics and mechanics, as well as an area of interest for the player. One Metacritic user wrote “*Any roguelike fans, action fans, Greek mythology fans, [...] MUST check out Hades.*”(m6, Appendix D.2). On Steam, a user wrote “*The story is faithful to Greek mythology and remains original and unpredictable at the same time.*”(s1, Appendix D.1). Both are referring to how most players have some knowledge of Greek myth before they start playing, because of it’s prevalence in popular culture. This leads both to an interest in the game, as well as satisfaction when their expectations are fulfilled. Part of the satisfaction also seemed to relate to something akin to understanding an inside joke. The players not only got to use their prior knowledge; the game, in some ways, also rewarded them for it by allowing the player themselves to understand and vindicate design choices. For example, the Kotaku review reads “*Zeus adds lightning to abilities, because that is his main thing (aside from very bad horny decisions).*” [40] (see Figure 5.3). That is not to say the game is predictable. That said, there are many details for players to recognise.

Hades relatability comes not only from its use of Greek myth, but also from its characters and their story arcs. This appeared prevalently within Zagreus story especially. While there are few to no choices for the player to make in the main storyline, it still contains several tropes that many players can relate to. Zagreus



**Figure 5.3:** Screenshot showing the some of the boons offered by Zeus to temporarily upgrade Zagreus abilities.

story is of the coming-of-age variety, but it also heavily features man-vs-fate, father-son-relations and parental abandonment. Gamespot explained it as *“I understood why Zagreus would want to leave the shadow of his overbearing, distant father. That convergence between player and character motivation is a powerful feeling, and it’s what Supergiant delivers so brilliantly.”* [38]. They imply that since the player and the character motivation are shared, the player will be as motivated as Zagreus to break out of the underworld, thereby continuing the game. This view was shared by several reviews, though not all. IGN wrote *“Zag is a rebellious heartthrob trying to find his place in the world between Hades and Mount Olympus. His sympathetic coming-of-age story brought me in, [...]”* [39] thereby implying that while they do not necessarily share Zagreus motivation, they sympathise with his quest and will therefore continue it.

Building relationships is another subtheme found under the larger Story theme. Hades is filled with characters from Greek mythology, including the playable main character Zagreus. As Zagreus makes his way through the underworld, he encounters both Olympian and Chthonic gods, as well as some other famous figures from Greek mythology, who all have something to say. Some offer their assistance in helping Zagreus’s attempt to escape, while others actively try to stop him. Between runs, in the House of Hades, there are other characters who often offer commentary on the latest escape attempt, some advice for the future, or even romance. In the game, many of the relationships between characters are established even before the player starts the story. As the game progresses, some new relationships form, and the already existing ones continue to develop. The player gets to take part in the development of relationships, not only as a passive listener, but also actively at some points. The dialogue is central to the game, and though it is possible to skip over the conversations between characters, most players will get to know at least one of the characters in the story of Zagreus.

The results from the analysis show that many players enjoyed these aspects. The



Kotaku review discussed how they enjoyed getting to know the characters, writing “*You get to know these characters as 10 hours give way to 20, 30, 60, and onward. When I first encountered Achilles while playing Hades’s early access version over the summer, I thought he was a dreary shadow perpetually posed against the same dull wall. Now, months later, he’s like a father, brother, and maybe more to me—a font of generosity in spite of his own past failures.*” [40]. Achilles can be seen in Figure 5.4. IGN came to a similar conclusion and wrote “*But the heart and soul of Hades, outside of its combat, lies in Zag’s interaction with various deities and mythic figures from Greek myth, like Achilles, Orpheus, and more. It turns out that adding a dash of dating simulator mechanics to a rogue-lite was the secret sauce in making good use of a large cast of interesting characters.*” [39]. They both press the point that getting to know these characters is a dynamic process where both the player’s perception of the character and the characters’ perception of Zagreus change over time.



**Figure 5.4:** Screenshot of Achilles talking to Zagreus

The last subtheme found under the Story theme is Immersive. This theme ties into the Intertwining of Story and Gameplay theme to some degree, but focuses more on the story and how it is told. The reviews agreed that what contributed to the immersiveness, in relation to the story, was not only the story itself, but also how it was told and the voice acting with which it was delivered.

Many reviews described how the narrative contributed to the immersion of the game by weaving together several different stories and arcs into one cohesive piece. This was partly done through Hades’s dialogue system, where characters will offer their comments both on Zagreus’s actions and other characters actions. This relates to the subtheme Build Relationships, but here the analysis focus on how this gave the player a sense of living in an interconnected world, and of their actions having consequences. The Kotaku review explained it as “*Characters, in turn, react to your progress and deeds, some of which come to directly involve them. Given the number of possible permutations of your progress both through the game and with various characters, it is a mind-bogglingly complex narrative system that somehow*

*manages to feel coherent at almost all times.*” [40]. One Steam user continued along the same lines, saying *“I’ve rarely heard the same line twice in +60h still amazes me.”*(s4, Appendix D.1). Some reviews commented on that Hades’s storytelling is unusual, not only in how it uses roguelike characteristics to its advantage, but also in how it uses its characters to tell the story. GameSpot summed it up as *“This is where Hades’ bid to tell its story differently pays off, as playing it eventually feels like living in a crowded home for months, one where arcs happen, but nothing truly ends.”* [38]. Hades’s story is mostly told through dialogue between Zagreus and the other characters he interact with, with the exception of the occasional input from the narrator. While not explicitly stated, the conclusion might be drawn that this way of storytelling immerses the player more into the story, since the player is the one driving the story forward with their actions.

All of Hades’s dialogue is voice acted. Though the voice acting was generally described along the lines of great, excellent and stellar, the reviewers would in some cases further describe how the voice acting brings the character to life, thereby adding another layer of immersion. One Steam user expressed how the voice acting not only increased their sense of immersion, but also how the characters’ voices fit their design and brought more depth to the design. They wrote *“Good voice acting, each character has a perfect voice for their sprite. Either soft-spoken, boastful etc. Still have some feeling of softness in it. Or maybe there are no voice actors and the characters actually the ones who speak! ( Plot twist )”* (s1, Appendix D.1). The GameSpot review continued along similar lines and wrote *“These interactions, as much as the precise combat, are the reason I kept coming back to Hades; while I was skeptical about how the roguelike structure would meld with Supergiant Games’ focus on characters and stories, they’ve written and voiced reams of dialogue and lore, and almost all of it is delivered with vigor and is intriguing enough to pore over between your treks through hell.”* [38]. This shows that the voice acting enhanced the dialogue, and thereby the story, as well as helped immerse the player into the game.

### 5.1.3 Gameplay

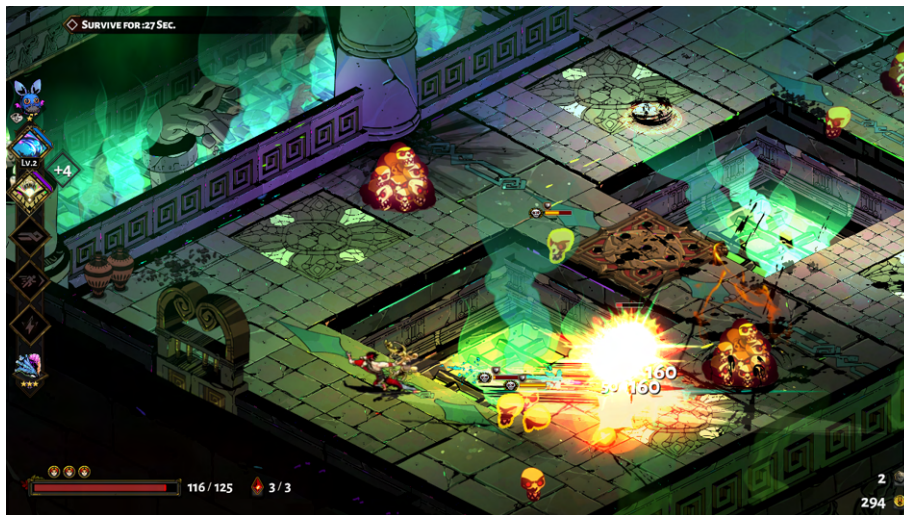
As with any game, player input plays a central part in the Hades experience. Hades is a roguelike hack ’n slash, where the player traverses through rooms, slaying foes by different means until they either reach the end or their demise and have to start over. Through the thematic analysis of reviews, four different subthemes were derived, namely *Engaging Combat*, *Agency*, *Longevity* and *Addictiveness*. These aspects were found to be some of the most important and they all have a generally positive impact on the game experience.

Engaging Combat comprises all things that make the combat feel enjoyable, and also keeps the player engaged during runs. This includes movement mechanics, such as dashing and plain mobility, but also different kinds of feedback, such as visual effects of boons, impact feedback when landing hits and slow-motion effects when

## 5. Results

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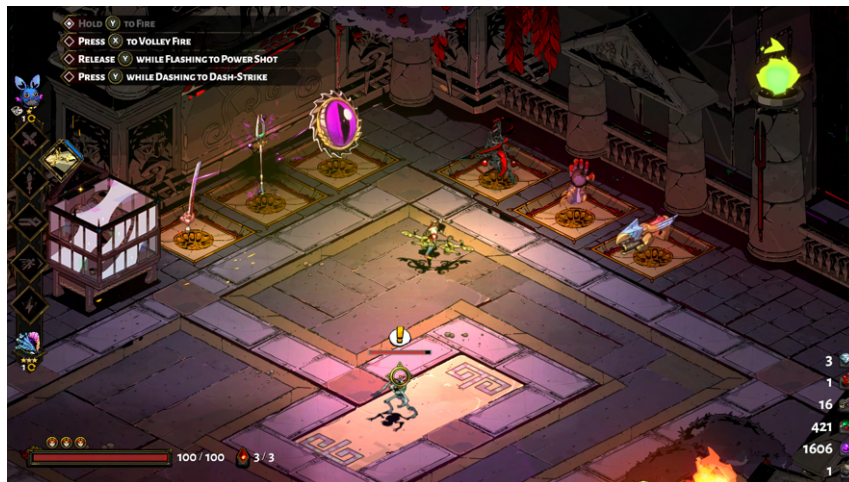
landing the final blow. A Steam user wrote: *“The combat alone is amazing and the game is a must-play just for that. It’s fast, varied, tactical, flashy, intuitive and super fun. One of the best Dungeon Crawlers ever.”* (s6, Appendix D.1). These words resonate quite well with the how the combat is structured. As previously mentioned, the game puts a lot of emphasis on the dash mechanic. When running around the player can always immediately dash in the opposite direction, and when engaging enemies, it is possible to interrupt attack animations. GameSpot’s review reads: *“Combat is quick and reactive, letting you chain attacks into dashes, dashes into special moves, and so on as you learn how to whittle enemy shields, avoid traps, and work over bosses.”* [38]. Each blow the player deals also provides a satisfying pause that lets the player feel the weight behind each attack, but these pauses can be dash-cancelled if there is a need to get out of harm’s way. This provides a sense of fluidity and godly power, which in turn results in a fun and engaging combat experience.



**Figure 5.5:** Screenshot of Zagreus delivering a powerful blow against a hoard of enemies.

To keep the combat and overall gameplay even more engaging, the game incorporates the concept of Agency which is the next subtheme to be discussed. The game provides a total of six different weapons, with some being melee oriented, some being ranged, and some being a mixture of both. These can be further modified with so-called Aspects. There is also a wide variety of keepsakes, companions and boons. This provides a vast array of customisation options, and lets the player choose their own path. Player agency was found to be a highly positive aspect of the gameplay experience. For example, the review from Kotaku reads: *“No matter how you play, you experience the tension of staring down imposing bosses, the thrill of accidentally assembling your dream build. You die a whole, whole lot, but you do it at your own pace.”* [40]. This highlights the freedom the game offers the player. It allows, and expects, the player to fail, and every run presents a new set of boon combinations and weapon upgrades. Slowly, but surely, the player gains knowledge about different possibilities in playstyles, and if they are lucky there might be more than one that fits their needs. GameSpot’s review reads: *“Each of the six weapons you can equip*

*pushes you to play differently, and weapon-specific modifiers nudge you towards using different parts of your toolset; you might be comfortable poking enemies from afar with the Varatha spear, for example, but with a boon from Daedalus that triples the damage of your dash attack, you're going to want to close the distance and juke constantly.” [38].* The player can choose to go about their runs in any way they desire, but it constantly encourages different approaches.



**Figure 5.6:** Screenshot of The Armory where Zagreus can pick between weapons.

The final two subthemes are related to some extent; they both deal with reasons for the player to keep playing, but in slightly different ways. Longevity comprises the amount of content and general replayability; i.e. what the game does to keep things feeling fresh. Addictiveness, on the other hand, deals with how the game keeps the player hooked. There is a fine line between these two, and they relate to the previous subthemes in various ways. Like previously stated, the game offers an array of weapons and boons. However, it also offers various permanent upgrades, relationship building, cosmetic upgrades of rooms and the challenging Heat options which makes the runs more challenging. Addictiveness mostly comes from how the game makes the player feel while playing.

In the review from The Guardian it says: *“I know I won’t stop returning to the underworld until Zagreus sees the surface. Just as each run holds the promise of that perfect boon, that lucky run of enemies perfectly suited to the weapon I’ve chosen, something can always happen to screw things up.” [43].* Similarly, the Polygon review pointed out the following: *“But even when I beat that boss and finish my journey, it’s not over. The game tempts me with new materials to upgrade my weapons further and customize my home. But no matter how many runs I win or how many times I’ve fallen, I’m always jumping out that window again, just trying to see what that first upgrade will be, and then the next, and then the next.” [42].* Both reviews discuss how the game keeps you hooked on promises of further upgrades and customisation. Since the game caters to many different playstyles, the player might have to retry a couple of times before they get their preferred setup of boons.

While the player waits for their favourite combination, the game encourages trying different weapons. Partly through the Dark Thirst effect, which gives the player more darkness during that run, as well as by offering valuable rewards for playing the game with each weapon. Additionally, each keepsake can be leveled up by beating a certain number of chambers with them equipped. This might seem monotonous, but it makes the player try different combinations. A steam user writes: “*A perfect blend of permanent progression and randomized items and upgrades lost on death means that each run is unique and engaging, but you can also feel yourself progressing and becoming stronger. What all of this means is that the game warrants being played again and again and again which is great, considering how fun it is.*” (s6, Appendix D.1). These words summarise the overarching theme, Gameplay, quite well. There is fun to be had, progression to be made, tons of variety, and incentive to keep playing. However, it would seem quite obvious to say that fun and engaging gameplay is what makes people enjoy the experience. There is seemingly more finesse to it than that.

Through the thematic analysis of the reviews, it was found that the blend of these different elements is what matters. Hades maintains a great balance of engaging gameplay that caters to people of different playstyles, and the right amount of content and variety to keep its players coming back for more.

### 5.1.4 Aesthetics

Almost all reviews mention Hades’s aesthetics in a positive manner, though few go into details. Still, this was found to contribute positively to the players’ experience. The praise of the game’s aesthetic could be divided into the two subthemes *Vivid Art* and *Banging Soundtrack*, the first consisting of the game’s visual aspect and the former of the game’s music.

The name Banging Soundtrack refers to the rock music featured in the game, and was inspired by the quote “*Hades is a blend of Rock n’ Lute, a melodic partnership between old and new that always pumps me up for my next journey through the Underworld.*” from IGN’s Hades review [39]. This quote was found to accurately sum up both how the music sounds and is viewed. Darren Korb, who composed the soundtrack, describes it as a mix of Mediterranean and metal, which serves as a reference to the setting of the game, an ancient Greek version of hell. He also comments that it has lighter and more playful parts to better convey the tone they were aiming for [54].

The soundtrack is mostly described with generic praise, such as excellent, catchy, or stunning, but a few reviews further describe how the soundtrack matches matches the setting, thereby adding another layer of immersion. The IGN review goes on adding that “*I think the highest compliment I can pay to the Hades soundtrack is that it simply belongs.*”, a sentiment echoed by a steam user who wrote “*The music and sound design are incredible. Each hit is accentuated perfectly and every environment is enriched greatly by the ambiance.*”(s6, Appendix D.1). More about

immersion in Hades can be found in Section 5.1.2, but here it can still be noted that the soundtrack is an important part of the overall player experience, even when it is less obvious to the player. This seems to be the case with how the soundtrack increases and decreases in intensity to match the game intensity. This was noted in the PC-gamer review as well, describing how “... puts me in such a focused flow-state I don’t notice the soundtrack accentuating the action. If a game can distract me from Darren Korb rocking out then it’s doing everything right.” [41]. In other words, Hades’s soundtrack contributes positively, not only by matching the geographical setting, but also by establishing moods and an appropriate attention level.

The second subtheme is Vivid Art. Much like with the game’s music, most reviews do not go into detail about what they liked about the art, more than the fact they like it. The exception is the character design, which will be further discussed later in this section.

The game’s art style was generally described along the lines of beautiful, gorgeous, and well-drawn. Hades uses a distinctive art style that is easy to recognise. The environment, enemies and characters are drawn colourfully and in a stylised way, and enemies and characters have distinct silhouettes. It also uses deep shadows and lighting to increase readability. The Sixth Axis describes it as “...an absolute treat for both your eyes and ears.” [44].



(a) Megara



(b) Dionysus

**Figure 5.7:** Figure a and b shows screenshots of two different characters drawn in Hades’ distinctive style. The analysis found that many character designs were considered attractive by players.

As previously mentioned, it was noticed that while the game’s visuals were generally vaguely described, their descriptions of the character design were more detailed. Here, the design were not only described as beautiful or stunning, but also as attractive. The Guardian wrote: “Perhaps this is just everyone’s lockdown libido desperately searching for an outlet, but in the past couple of weeks social media has gone mad for art director Jen Zee’s wonderfully drawn gods and monsters, with their elegant musculature, casually revealing outfits and appropriately godlike profiles.[...] Even the Minotaur is kind of hot” [43]. Her sentiments were echoed by The Sixth Axis, who wrote: “...nearly everyone you meet is as hot as Hell. That’s not a necessity in a game, but it’s always nice when it’s there.”. Many Steam reviews were

limited to only one sentence, describing only the character cast's attractiveness. This shows that while an attractive character design is not strictly necessary, it still elevates the player experience. Examples of the character designs can be found in figure 5.7.

It should be noted that Hades features a large cast of characters, varying widely in age and ethnicity. Not all characters have a human appearance, for example Dusa and Skelly, who the player can interact with in the House of Hades, are designed as a floating gorgon head and a skeleton respectively. This might imply that what is considered attractive in a character design depends more on the art style and how they are depicted than on the characters physical features. Despite the large variety elsewhere, it should be observed that most characters are very fit, thereby narrowing down what is considered attractive, or what this analysis can confirm to be considered attractive. The reason other physiques are not included might be because the designs are supposed to depict gods, thereby narrowing down what is considered an accurate design.

## 5.2 Guidelines

Using the result of the thematic analysis, a set of guidelines for creating a captivating game were created. Since the guidelines were derived from Hades, and Hades reviews, they focus on what made Hades a good game. It should be noted that other games and genres might have other good aspects that are not mentioned in these guidelines, nor are these guidelines a foolproof guide to create a captivating game of another genre, or even the same genre as Hades. They should be used as an inspiration and a starting point, not be blindly followed. The guidelines are described below, accompanied with an example from Hades. Further examples can be found in Appendix A.

### 5.2.1 Intertwining story and game mechanics

Intertwining of story and game mechanics is when mechanics, such as weapons, runs, upgrades, and more are explained in the story through dialogue with the characters and the lore of the game. The player should not be left wondering why they are doing something, or why they have access to upgrades, weapons, abilities and more. All of this should be clearly defined and explained to the players through the story, dialogue, and lore. This contributes to creating immersion, which many players seem to appreciate in games.

**Example:** In Hades, the mirror of night is used to purchase permanent upgrades for Zagreus. The upgrades include things like extra lives during runs, or extra damage to undamaged foes and more. These are purely mechanical, but there is a clear explanation in the story as to why Zagreus has access to these upgrades. The reason you have the mirror is because of Nyx. She wants Zagreus to have access to these upgrades in order to get stronger, so that he can escape the underworld.

### 5.2.2 Cater to multiple playstyles

Games are usually mostly defined by genre and this lets the player know roughly what to expect gameplay wise; but even in these genres players appreciate the game supporting different playstyles. Catering to different playstyles encourages multiple playthroughs and gives the game more longevity by giving the player variation. It also gives players who might not enjoy a certain genre usually a reason to play the specific game.

**Example:** Hades offers a total of six different weapons, some are melee-based, some are ranged, and some offer a mix of both. Stay far away and kite enemies with a bow, or dive headfirst into the fray with a sword; the choice is yours. Aegis, the Shield of Chaos, for example lets you fight up close but also lets you channel your inner Captain America by throwing it, causing it to bounce from enemy to enemy. Every weapon even has multiple variants which means that those who favour only the bow, for example, still have multiple options.

### 5.2.3 Incentivise players to change and vary playstyle

To incentivise the players to change playstyle means that the game should encourage the player to try out new things and different combinations of upgrades. This can lead to players discovering enjoyment in other playstyles that they otherwise would not have tried. For players who like to switch around, having the ability to choose a weapon, ability, or power up with some random variable that gives the player something extra could add to the experience. This also makes the game less monotonous for the player, allowing them to enjoy it longer, adding further to a game's longevity.

**Example:** In Hades you get to choose between 6 different weapons, after you have unlocked them all, at the start of your run. One of these weapons carry an effect called Dark Thirst which gives you 20% extra darkness, an in-game currency, during that run. For many players this is a good incentive to play with different weapons and for some it might result in a new favourite weapon. For images and more examples, see Appendix A.

### 5.2.4 Build on the players prior knowledge

Building on the player's prior knowledge is a way to ease the player into the game world and the gameplay. It can also make the player feel smart being able to use their previous knowledge to solve a puzzle or challenge. There are multiple ways to build on players' prior knowledge, and a vast amount of things the players' can be knowledgeable about. One example of things the players can have prior knowledge in are stories, such as tropes, myths, or legends. Some games use early levels to teach the player certain game mechanics or patterns in order to prepare the players' for more difficult levels later in the game.

**Example:** Both the gameplay and the story in Hades uses previous knowledge the player either has since before playing the game or knowledge they gain during the



game. Many are familiar with the Greek myths and gods and those who are not will still recognise many story beats as they are distinctly familiar for most humans. The gameplay also builds on the knowledge the player gains during play. In all of the different sections of the game you meet enemies that prepare you for the upcoming boss fights. This can be most clearly seen in Elysium with the large so-called Nemean Chariot, whose bull rush is the same as the one of Asterius attacks, Asterius being a boss the player has to defeat to exit that game area. This means that even before you meet the boss you are familiar with their attacks and how to handle them. For images and more examples, see Appendix A.

### 5.2.5 Actions and combat should feel satisfying

Action, combat, and all other parts of gameplay should feel good and satisfying for the player to create a more enjoyable experience overall. This can be done by adding visual- and sound-effects when the player attacks, dash, and perform other similar actions, as well as timing the animation appropriately with when the player initiated the action. Exactly what will work for a specific game is something which should be playtested thoroughly, as this varies from game to game. The examples mentioned below can be seen as references or inspiration. Note that because these examples were chosen by the authors of this document, the examples reflect our personal opinions and perhaps not that of the average players.

**Example:** Aesthetics (see more under Use Aesthetic to add a new layer of immersion) can be used to create a better game feel. The dash in Hades, which many players have described as satisfying, might not be as satisfying without its sound, animation and visual effects. The attacks in Hades are also accompanied with visual and sound effects that add to their appeal.

### 5.2.6 Use Aesthetics to add a new layer of immersion

Music and art are often used to present the world of the game, building an atmosphere for the player to be immersed. These form the aesthetics (not to be confused with the definition from MDA) of the game setting the tone and feel of the game world, which is vital for an immersive game. The aesthetics should be cohesive, through all aspects of the game, in order to not break the immersion. This, like Game Feel, is something that should ideally be developed using playtesting. For this Guideline it is also *highly* recommended that the reader looks at Appendix A for more examples as well as accompanying pictures.

**Example:** Hades is filled with vibrant colours and living environments. The portraits shown when talking to the different characters suit the style of the rest of the game, the voice acting is another factor that also adds to the cohesive aesthetic. Everything fits together and blends into one cohesive experience. For example the lava filled section Asphodel uses both colour as well as sound to immerse the player. The warm orange, reds and yellows, as well as the lava bubbles popping makes it so that the environment radiates with heat.

### 5.2.7 Respect the player's time

For many players games are a recreational activity or hobby. The player should therefore be allowed to choose their commitment level, being able to dive into some parts of the game while ignoring others, as best fits in their schedule. This also means they should be able to quit the game without having to worry about losing too much of their progress. Everything the player does in-game should have a purpose, everything should be meaningful in some way, or lead to some sort of progress, whether that is as lore and story, upgrades, or bringing the player closer to a goal. An in-game purpose can also be to just have fun.

**Example:** In Hades every run leads to some sort of progress, even if being defeated by the first enemy. When Zagreus dies he respawns in the House of Hades, where he can talk to different characters, which progresses the story and lets the player find more out about the characters. Moreover, if the player clears a few rooms but dies before defeating the final boss, they will still keep some of the permanent currencies which they can use to upgrade themselves, strengthening Zagreus for his next escape attempt.

### 5.2.8 Incentivise the player to do what they enjoy

Giving the player an additional reason to play the parts they enjoy in a game is the meaning of this last guideline. This can be done by offering some sort of reward or progress when completing the activity. Do notice that there is a difference between this and certain, so called, dark design patterns. See the Dark design pattern Play by Appointment from Dark Patterns in the Design of Games for further explanation [55]. The focus should be on players playing the game because they inherently enjoy it.

**Example:** There are several incentives in Hades that incentivise the player to do what they enjoy. Every run the player progresses the story further, both during the run and when the player returns to the House of Hades. Even if the player dies the story still progresses. The characters in Hades that the player can talk with always have something new to say. Hades also features permanent upgrades that make the player stronger through a mechanic called The mirror of night. These upgrades are purchased with a currency called Darkness which players can get as a reward for clearing rooms when doing a run of the game.

## 5.3 Demo

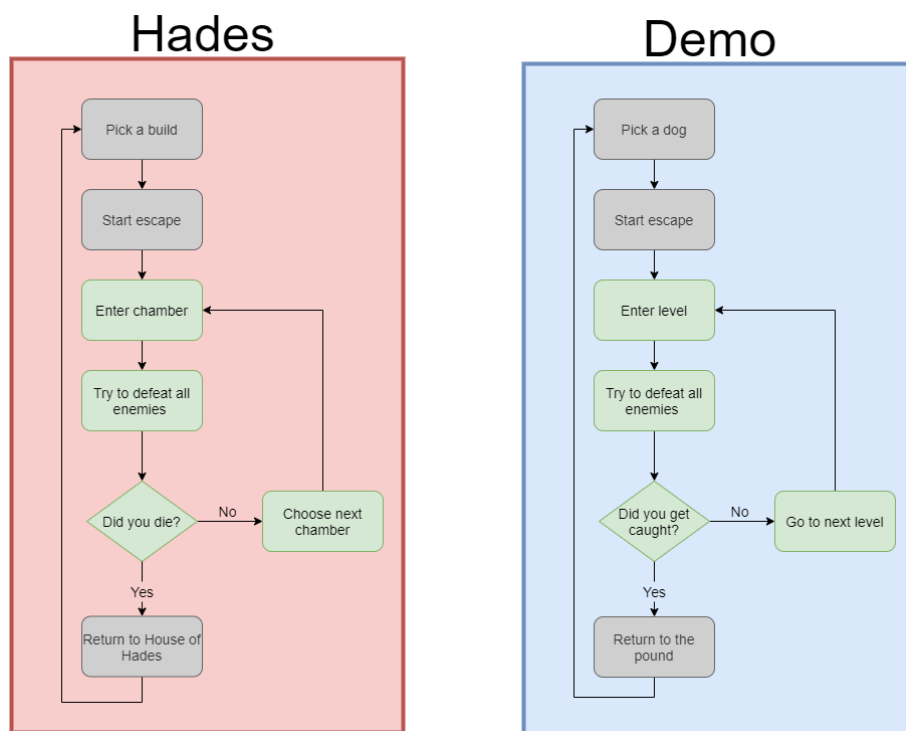
This section describes the demo which was made based on the previously mentioned guidelines. All guidelines have been taken into consideration when developing the demo. Because the demo was not finished, many of the guidelines are still yet to be seen in it.

The setting of our demo is that of a dog escaping a pound trying to find a better

home. Everything is seen from the dogs perspective, not in the sense of a first person view but that of a slanted reality compared to the human perception. The idea is to have a relatable environment that is slightly different in a comedic way. The familiarity helps with designing mechanics from a top down design pattern and lets the players figure out mechanics based on non-game knowledge. This can be likened to Hades setting in Greek myth which is familiar to a lot of people this lets the developers draw from a vast pool of already established lore. For example the demo has a scary mailman as an enemy because dogs usually bark at and chase this unfamiliar intruder.

Building on the players prior knowledge was something which much focus was put on. Playing as a dog against mailmen, cats, and other things that dogs often react to helps the player understand the world and the mechanics of the game.

It should be noted that the demo based on our guidelines is quite similar to Hades but this is not a requirement when following the guidelines and they are applicable for other types of game. Obviously Hades is a great inspiration to the guidelines and to the demo as well and many of the features are based on mechanics and ideas found in Hades. The demos gameplay loop has the player going from level to level combating various foes. As you progress through the levels, the story progresses.



**Figure 5.8:** Comparison of the structure of Hades gameplay loop and the gameplay loop of the demo.

The structure of the demo, shown in Figure 5.8 is similar to that of Hades. A game loop where the player starts over from the beginning after losing, was a core idea

that the group thought that it was well implemented in Hades and therefore was recreated. Agency, replayability and meaningful choices has emerged as important concepts to create good games. In the demo, the playable dog should be different each time you play and have differing play-patterns from others. An unlimited number of play-patterns is not possible, nor desirable. The game should have a certain feel to it when playing but small differences can be changed to add some variation to the different attempts.

The demo is supposed to be a small playable prototype that showcases the guidelines. The aim was to get at least one level, with at least one enemy, and a playable character which should also give the player some agency. Having enjoyable controls inspired by the dash from Hades is one of the main features of the demo, it may be simple but it adds a lot to the fun factor and gives players agency with the ability to temporally boost the speed.

Trying to emulate the mechanics and concepts from the paper prototype was a difficult process, and some ideas were too ambitious considering the deadline. With more time in a project solely dedicated to developing a game, more ideas from the paper prototype would have been implemented in the end.

The feeling of playing a game is ultimately a subjective experience and it's hard to pin point and needs play testing to be fully realised, it's still an important part to consider in game development and to aim for a certain "game feel". Trying to implement this enjoyable feeling was still the goal of the demo, focusing on few important mechanics was key.

As an example the dash in Hades is one of the most enjoyable mechanics that is one of the centrepieces of combat in the game, the demo tries to recreate the feeling of a "good dash". See Figure 5.9.

Due to time constraints and to prioritise other parts of the project, the play-testing had to be changed. Play-testing within the group still took place, but the planned play-test sessions with participants not involved in the project, did not take place. Therefore the demo is lacking in feedback from non-biased sources.



(a) Test level with a dashing player.



(b) Zagreus dashing in Hades.

**Figure 5.9:** Comparison of the dash in Hades and the Prototype

# 6

## Discussion

This chapter will commence with comparisons between Hades and other successful games. This comparison is done with the help of the guidelines derived from the thematic analysis of Hades, and will try to validate these guidelines. The chapter also features a discussion on representation within games, as well as an evaluation of the gathering of code extracts.

### 6.1 Comparisons with other games

This section will contain comparisons between Hades and other games. The games share similar aspects, and are considered to be generally well liked and successful. Because of their success it is relevant to compare them to the guidelines derived from the thematic analysis of Hades. By doing this, an evaluation of the relevance and accuracy of the guidelines can be performed. Some of these comparisons can also be found in more detail in Appendix A, which includes the full guidelines document with numerous examples.

It should be noted that at least some of the authors have had previous experiences with each of the chosen games. This ensured that enough time could be allocated to making well founded comparisons. The only exception to this rule was *Have a Nice Death*, since it was released in an early access state during the course of the project. However, seeing how the game was inspired by Hades [56], it was decided that it could make for an interesting comparison.

#### 6.1.1 The Binding of Isaac

The reason for comparing this game with the guidelines is because it follows a similar structure in its gameplay, and it is a game of the roguelike genre. As can be seen in Appendix E, besides the other games made by Supergiant Games, *BoI* is one of the most frequently mentioned games when the reviews compared Hades to other games.

Like many roguelike games, the main character Isaac battles through room after room against a variety of monsters, with some sort of larger challenge at the end of each floor. Because this is a common structure in roguelike games, it follows the guideline of “Build on the players prior knowledge”, assuming the player has played similar games previously.

Another way the game builds on player’s prior knowledge is by incorporating symbols and characters from religion. The story is seemingly being inspired by the story of Abraham, which can be found in multiple religious texts. While there is a story in BoI, it is presented in a less direct way compared to Hades. The story of BoI starts with a narrated video, with additional bits shown during loading screens between floors, as well as context surrounding items and bosses. In the later DLC of the second game, pieces of dialogue can also be heard as the player moves through certain floors. In Hades on the other hand, the story is mostly driven by the dialogue with other characters. More comparisons can be found in table 6.1.

**Table 6.1:** This table briefly discusses elements in Hades and The Binding of Isaac that functions similarly both for mechanical and aesthetic purposes. Note that the table is not exhaustive.

Hades	BoI	Comments
Charon	Shop	Charon and the Shop lets the player spend resources for upgrades during the run. This upgrades are not permanent and will disappear after each run.
Boons	Upgrades	Both games uses random upgrades to power up the player and change up the player experience from run to run. Boons however gives the player more choice, three different boons are available to pick from each time and mechanics for re-rolling exists in the game. BoI on the other hand strictly gives random upgrades.
Chambers	Levels	Hades uses pre-built chambers and randomises the orders the rooms appear in. More chambers are in the game then the player will be able to enter in a run, so one run will be different from another. BoI randomly generates levels at the start of each run. The levels are composed of tiles in a random order, with some rules to make the level playable. The tiles are created beforehand like the chambers in Hades.
Bosses	Bosses	Both games uses boss battle to end each zone, giving the player a different challenge compared to the regular rooms before moving on and increasing the difficulty in the next zone while adding new enemies.
Aspects, Keepsakes, and Weapons	Characters	Both games have permanent unlockable upgrades that can changes future play-thoughts. Hades have weapons and their aspects, while BoI has new characters to play as.

While the story seems to be an important factor to keep playing a game, it does not seem to be what drives players to keep playing BoI. The incentive to keep playing is instead the constant change in how the game is played. Like Hades, BoI also has randomised power ups which can be combined in various ways. With the most

recent game and the most recent DLC, BoI includes more than 700 items and almost 200 trinkets which can be combined, creating a myriad of possible combinations. As many of these are unlocked as the player progresses, the more the game is played, the more variability and options are available.

These power ups and their effects add new ways to play the game, which follows the guideline “Cater to multiple playstyles”. However, it should be mentioned that the player does not have as much control over how the game is played compared to Hades. Related to this is the guideline “Incentivise players to change and vary playstyle”. Incentive for changing playstyle does not exist, as the player has no control over what power ups they will encounter. Each run will give randomised power ups, changing the playstyle each time.

### 6.1.2 The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild

Arguably, one of the main appeals of BotW is the amount of freedom the player has within the game, which relates to the guideline “Caters to multiple playstyles”. A majority of the game’s content is optional, with only the starting area and a couple of initial tasks being mandatory. Few things need to be done in a specific order, and the player is allowed to explore the world as they see fit, with the end goal of defeating the final boss. The player is free to chose what quests to follow, and what locations to visit, but there are also multiple other ways in which player agency is present. Almost every problem presented in the game can be solved in more than one way, often many more. This allows the players to think for themselves and come up with their own solutions, and to play as best fits them. What type of weapon to use, how to acquire certain resources, how to move from location to location, what clothes to wear, are all things that the player can control and influence.

This freedom to play as one chooses is something we see also in Hades, although a bit different. While the game is based somewhat on randomness, there are choices that the player can make in order to affect the game, and shape the combat to their preference. Items and upgrades which makes randomness a bit less random, or increase the odds in the player’s favour. If the player wants to have a particular boon, depending on which one, it can most likely be acquired using the right combination of items and upgrades.

Continuing with the guideline “Caters to multiple playstyles”, one comparison which can be made about the combat is the choice of long versus close range weapons. In BotW the player can choose between a number of weapon types, which can be divided into long range (bows, boomerang-like, magic wands) and short range (swords, spears, clubs), some of which can be seen in Figure 6.1. Though it should be noted that all weapons can be used to hit close range enemies and all handheld weapons can be thrown at least once, and therefore used as a long range weapon. A similar division can be made with the weapons in Hades which can be seen in figure 6.2. Though some weapons can function as both long and short range weapons depend-





**Figure 6.1:** Screenshots some of the available weapons in BotW

ing on upgrades and also on if the player used the attack or special. This division allows for the player to make the choice of how to shape their battle style drastically.



**Figure 6.2:** Room with weapons where player's choose their starting setup before each run.

Also related to combat is the guideline “Incentivise players to change and vary playstyle”. Some of the equipment in BotW has a durability counter, meaning that after being used a certain amount of times the equipment will break. This is something which is supposed to encourage the player to use new weapons, to improvise, and adds strategic depth [57]. By having equipment break, the player is forced to explore further, has to find new and possibly better weapon replacements, but is also encouraged to use what is left in their inventory.

Another comparison which can be made is how the story aspect of both games are treated. Like most other aspects in BotW, the story is also optional. Should the player not want to listen or read the dialogue of the characters or watch cutscenes,

those can easily be skipped. In Hades, much of the dialogue can be skipped by not interacting with any characters, and for the ones which the player is required to interact with the dialogue can quickly be skipped with the press of a button. In both games the dialogue and story is something the player can choose to take part in. This can be seen as one way to “Respect the player’s time”, as it gives the players the ability to control what their time is spent on.

Yet another comparison one can make is the options for increased difficulty. With a DLC for BotW one can start the game in Master mode, increasing the difficulty of the game by, among other things, replacing most enemies with a more difficult variant, and increasing the amount of enemies in the world. Even without this Master Mode, BotW also increases the amount of enemies in the game depending on how far the player has progressed in the game. Hades handles this partly by using The Pact of Punishment, a menu accessible later in the game which allows the player to add elements to the game in order to increase the difficulty. Examples include increased amount of enemies, additional health for enemies, a time limit, increased costs of items, etc. Hades also includes a so called hellmode, which forces the player to always play using The Pact of Punishment. These factors relate to the guideline “Incentivise the player to do what they enjoy”, as the added difficulty and challenge can be fun [58]. More similarities can be seen in table 6.2.

**Table 6.2:** This table briefly discusses elements in Hades and The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild that functions similarly both for mechanical and aesthetic purposes. Note that this table is not exhaustive.

Hades	BotW	Comments
Charon	Beedle and Others	Charon and Beedle are both characters within the games which offer the player the opportunity to spend money for resources. Both characters show up in different places throughout the game offering their services. Besides Beedle there are also other characters and shops the player can exchange goods and currencies with.
Mirror of Night	Goddess statues and Great Fairy	Using the currency darkness, the player can receive permanent upgrades in Hades, increasing health and adding other upgrades. Similarly, the goddess statues allow the player to either increase health or stamina in BotW. In addition to the goddess statues there also exists Great Fairies which allow the player to upgrade their clothes.
Weapon selection	Breakable weapons	Different weapons with distinct playstyles can be found in both games. The games handles them differently, Hades lets the player pick one before each run and the abilities may be modified during the run. BotW implements breakable weapons so that one single weapon cannot be used for the entire game.
Boon	Systematic mechanics	Both games gives the players multiple ways of completing task. Hades's is combat focused but still lets the player pick boons to change play style from melee to ranged or aggressive to more defensive. BotW uses systematic game design to give the player a couple of different abilities that interact with the world in different ways. A player may use these in combination to find many different solutions to problems.

### 6.1.3 Have a Nice Death

Have a Nice Death (HaND) has many similarities to Hades, one being that both games are roguelikes. Both games also have a striking art-style, and were both released in early access. Hades was released to early access four years before the release of HaND, and has been stated to have served as an inspiration in the creation of HaND [56]. Because of these similarities, HaND is a game of interest to compare to Hades both now and in the future, and could give insight to the influence of successful games.

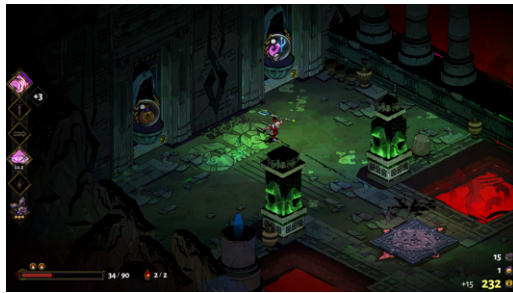
The setting of HaND is the underworld, where souls end up after dying in the real world. This setting connects to the guideline “Build on the players prior knowl-

**Table 6.3:** This table briefly discusses elements in Hades and Have a Nice Death that functions similarly both for mechanical and aesthetic purposes. Note that this table is not exhaustive.

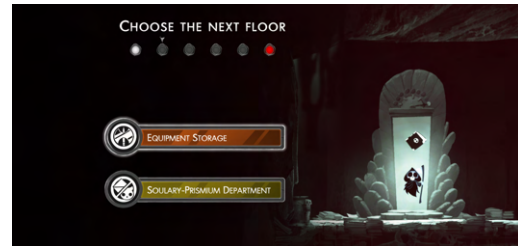
Hades	HaND	Comments
Charon	Shop	Charon and the Shop lets the player spend resources for upgrades during the run. This upgrades are not permanent and will disappear after each run.
Doors	Elevator	The doors at the end of each chamber in Hades and the elevators at the end of each level in HaND lets the players make meaningful choices about the progress. The existence of multiple doors in Hades lets the player choose what kind of reward they get, and the elevator transports the player to the next level of the player's choice. See Figure 6.3
Boons	Curses	Randomized upgrades. See figure 6.4
Darkness	Ingots	Both are currencies used to buy permanent upgrades between runs.
Dash	Dash	Satisfying movement in games that gives the player more movement options.
Bosses	Bosses	Both games uses boss battle to end each zone, giving the player a different challenge compared to the regular rooms before moving on and increasing the difficulty in the next zone while adding new enemies.

edge”, as it is a place which has been portrayed in various media, and is also a place described in many religions. A trope which is found in both games is the concept that gods related to death have to deal with a lot of paperwork in connection with new souls arriving to the underworld. In Hades it is shown as a part of the everyday work of the god Hades and a number of *Shades*, something which the main character Zagreus shows a distaste for. By comparison, the main character in HaND, Death, is shown to be fed up with the way the paperwork is currently being handled, as he at one point gets buried by the stacks of paper. This setting in HaND, in combination with the story, gives the player context which helps explain and justify mechanics in the game. Because of this, the game also follows the guideline “Intertwining story and game mechanics”.

Another guideline which HaND follows is “Incentivise players to change and vary playstyle”. Throughout a run of the game the player will encounter different upgrades adding new attacks available to use for that specific run. As these upgrades are randomised the set of attacks will often be different from the previous run. There are a number of different types of attacks, each having the possibility to change the playstyle. Because the player is only allowed to have two additional attacks besides the default one, when another attack is presented, the player can switch an old attack for the new one. A motivation here being that the new attack might be more powerful, faster, use less resources or other factors. This is also connected to the



(a) Doors in Hades with choices of reward.



(b) Elevator with choice for next level and reward.

**Figure 6.3:** Figure a and b shows of the two games and how they mechanically lets player choose rewards of a random selection.



(a) Hades boon choices.



(b) HaND curse choices.

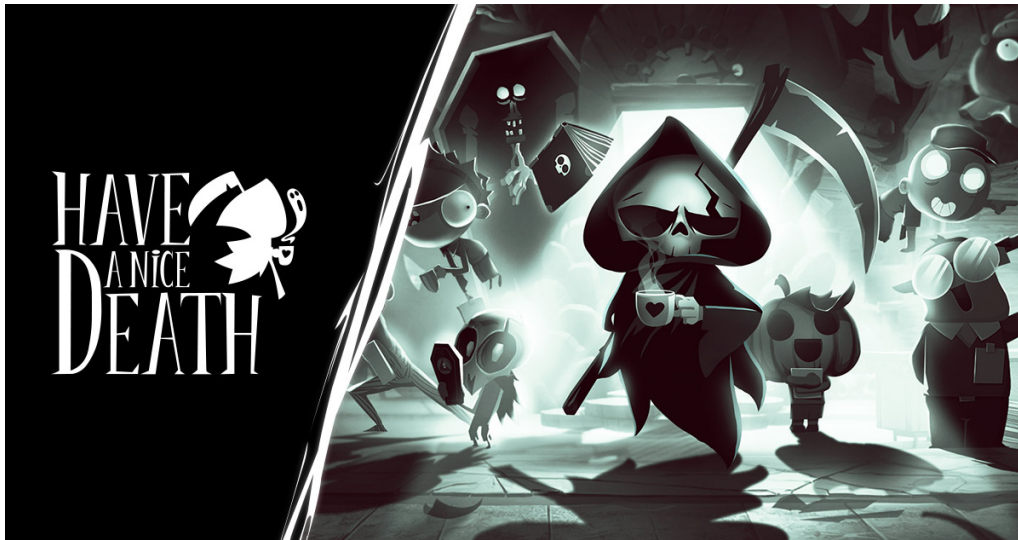
**Figure 6.4:** Figure a and b shows how players chooses power ups in the two games.

guideline “Cater to multiple playstyles”. Another way the game allows for multiple playstyles is the upgrading of the default attack. By upgrading the default attack, depending on which upgrade is chosen, the way the attack is performed changes drastically.

Yet another guideline HaND follows is “Use Aesthetic to add a new layer of immersion”. One of the ways HaND achieves this is through using hand-drawn assets, adding to the visual appeal of the game. The colours used in the game are muted and dark, making the game seem to be almost in greyscale, as can be seen in Figure 6.5. The general lack of saturated colours creates contrast against the enemies and effects from attacks, increasing focus on the most important things on the screen. This use of colours seem suitable for the portrayal of the underworld which is presented, making the place seem abandoned, unfriendly, and sterile. A soft glow can be seen throughout the first floor of the game, which could make the place seem dusty, adding to the atmosphere of an old abandoned office space.

Another way HaND creates its aesthetic is with its use of sound effects and music. As Death moves through the different areas music plays, often including sounds typically associated with ghosts, zombies, and other similar creatures. These sounds match the aesthetic of the visuals, as well as the story itself. One example of how

the sounds add to the immersion of the game is when Death is hit by an enemy. When this happens, a record-scratch sound effect plays, and the music gets slightly distorted, signalling that something bad has happened. Another example is that when trapped in an extra challenging part of the level, an alarm clock rings and the pace of the music picks up. This, in combination with the increase of enemies as well as the change in colour, adds to building a more stressful atmosphere.



**Figure 6.5:** Banner from Steam of Have a Nice Death.

### 6.1.4 Mega Man X

Needless to say, Mega Man X is not a recent game. However, it is interesting to consider how an older game might adhere to some of the guidelines presented in this thesis. Despite its age, there is a certain finesse in how the game teaches the player how to play the game. In a video made by YouTube creator Arin Hanson, the introduction level in Mega Man X is discussed in vivid detail [59]. The video drew attention to the fact that some of the game’s elements could adhere to the guidelines presented in this paper.

Much like how Hades prepares its players for future challenges, Mega Man X starts off with introducing simple challenges. For example, as Hanson mentions, there is a wall to the left at the very start, indicating that one progresses by moving to the right [59]. Then, one encounters an enemy, which can easily be jumped over. Then, the following enemy is way too tall to jump over, so the player learns that they have to shoot this enemy to clear the way.

The game continues throwing obstacles in one’s way, and what this does is preparing the player for upcoming perils and challenges. Hades does something similar, as it throws the player into the fray without much instruction on how to play. The player has to feel their way forward to find how to play the game. Both games “Build on the player’s prior knowledge”, and especially the information the player gathers during the initial stages of the experience.

A key difference between the games is that in Hades, the player progresses by dying and starting over, while in Mega Man X, the player has to complete levels in order to make progress. However, once the introduction stage has been completed, the player can choose from several different stages. Each stage houses a boss with a certain ability. When beating a boss, the player acquires the boss’s weapon, which can be selected by using the shoulder buttons or through the screen shown in Figure 6.6. Some weapons are more effective against certain enemies and bosses, but the game does not explicitly disclose what the optimal path is. It is up to the player to decide where to go first. If one path is too difficult, then it is possible to try something else. On repeated playthroughs, the player can try different routes to try to figure out strengths and weaknesses of enemies and bosses. In comparison, in Hades, the player progressively unlocks new weapons and abilities, and it becomes possible to take different approaches. Both games provide some kind of freedom when it comes to how they are to be played, and they “Incentivise the player to change and vary playstyle”.

During the introduction stage in Mega Man X, the player faces off against an undefeatable boss, telling the player that they have to get stronger. Much like in first escape attempt in Hades, the player learns that they are not strong enough when starting out. Throughout Mega Man X, the player encounters numerous other upgrades besides the weapon-based ones. There is a dash mechanic, a spiked helmet to break blocks overhead, and even some ridiculously powerful abilities that make the endgame much easier. The dash mechanic feels especially great to execute, and it speeds up the gameplay significantly. It lets the player perform long dash-jumps,

as well as quickly dodge enemies if necessary. Combined with the weapon selection, this aligns well with the guideline “Actions and combat should feel satisfying”. Additionally, some of the different upgrades are hidden away, adding to the game’s replayability. The more the game is played, the more prepared, and powerful, the player gets. All of this “Incentivises the player to do what they enjoy” and come back for multiple playthroughs.



(a) Level selection screen.



(b) Pause menu, showing weapon selection.

**Figure 6.6:** Screenshots showing levels and weapons in Mega Man X.

Another detail about the Mega Man X, and the Mega Man series as a whole, is its attention to music [60]. Each stage in Mega Man X has a unique theme, and similarly to Hades, the music changes when players face off against bosses. A Mega Man X reviewer stated the following: “The “Maverick Battle Theme” song is fittingly adrenaline-pumping and works great as a boss battle song.” [60]. This fits quite well with the guideline “Use aesthetics to add immersion to the game”. The banging soundtrack helps bringing the experience to the next level.



**Table 6.4:** This table displays some of the similarities between Hades and Mega Man X. Note that this table is not exhaustive.

Hades	MMX	Comments
Dash	Dash	There is a dash mechanic in both games, and in both cases, it gives the player a responsive movement option that speeds up the game, but also lets the player dodge incoming attacks.
Weapons	Weapons	Both games offer a wide selection of weapons. In Hades, these are unlocked by collecting keys during escape attempts, and you can only choose one per attempt. In Mega Man X, the weapons are acquired by defeating the bosses of the different levels. The weapons can then be accessed at will for the rest of the playthrough.
Bosses	Bosses	The bosses in both games serve as a challenge before moving on to the next level. The approach is slightly different, seeing how in Mega Man X, the player can pick the order in which to face off against the different bosses. Both games employ a music change for the boss fights.
Death Defiance	Sub Tanks	In Hades, the player can choose an upgrade called Death Defiance, which activates to restore half of the health points when the health bar is depleted. In Mega Man X, the player can find so-called Sub Tanks, which can be used manually from the pause menu to restore health points at any time.

### 6.1.5 Summary of game comparisons

As the previous sections explained, Hades have several similarities with other successful games. Table 6.5 shows which games fulfil which guidelines. The fact that all games fulfil some, or all, of the guidelines show that the guidelines have a degree of accuracy, and are relevant aspects to consider when designing any game. Not just a Hades lookalike. It should be noted that not all games in the table are meant to function the same way, thereby making some of the guidelines less relevant in the case of that individual game. BoI for example is, like many other roguelikes, designed around the concept of mastery, and therefore puts less emphasis on respecting the player's time, as well as catering to fewer playstyles to some degree, since the player cannot choose their powerups. See Section 6.1.1 for more details.

**Table 6.5:** Table shows an overview of which guidelines from section 5.2 different games fulfil.

	Hades	BotW	BoI	HaND	MMX	Demo
Intertwine story and game mechanics	X	X		X		
Cater to multiple playstyles	X	X	X	X		
Incentivise players to change and vary playstyle	X	X	X	X	X	
Build on the player's prior knowledge	X	X	X	X	X	X
Actions and combat should feel satisfying	X	X		X	X	X
Use Aesthetics to add a new layer of immersion	X	X	X	X	X	X
Respect the player's time	X	X	X	X		
Incentivise the player to do what they enjoy	X	X	X	X		

## 6.2 Ethics concerning character design

While Hades takes place in Greece and is based on Greek mythology, the characters in the story are presented with more diversity than other games based on the same lore. This is something which people have taken notice of and praised. As stated by Greg Kasavi (creative director of Hades), “They’re called the Greek gods because they were worshiped in ancient Greece, not because they themselves are ethnically Greek” [61]. Showing a wide variety of characters allows the players to more easily identify and relate to the game. The choice to include a more diverse cast of characters also makes sense historically, as the people of ancient Greece would have met people from all over the world due to its location by the sea as well as business and trade.

For our own demo, representation and portrayal have been considered. Since the game is far from being finished, many aspects have only been considered and discussed, but not implemented. How each species is presented is something to consider further. How the animals speak, behave, interact with each other, and are displayed all play into how the characters will be interpreted. Even presenting cats as evil and dogs as good as a trope is something that might be worth considering further. Would it be better to include both good cats and evil dogs? Would it be better to justify the cats actions, or let them be evil for the sake of being the villain? Is the idea that cats are evil based on stereotypes, and can those stereotypes cause harm? To present all cats as evil would be to generalise a specific group. This can lead to prejudice by making them out to be a pure evil other, especially if cats are consistently presented as evil across media. One example being that although most of the characters encountered are animals of different species, this could be interpreted as representing different groups of people. It would be undesirable to represent a

group of people, whether accidentally or on purpose, as evil and play into existing real world prejudice.

Besides the animals, there would likely be humans included as well. Considering who is included, and how they are presented is something to consider further if the demo and game is continued.

### 6.3 Hades reviews and the MDA-framework

As mentioned in Section 3.1, the MDA-framework has received criticism for putting too heavy emphasis on mechanics as well as being unsuited for narrative design [23]. Those are both aspects that made the framework less attractive for this project, especially considering how Hades's story as well as how it was told and woven into the game's mechanics were found to be an impotent part of its success. However the main reason the MDA-framework was not used in this project was that we did not look to dissect the mechanics of Hades, but instead looked at what the players who wrote the reviews picked up as important as to why the game captivated them. That is, this project worked with qualitative data and produced a qualitative result.

It should also be noted that the MDA-framework is very academic, and was not directly applied by by the reviewers. Especially the terms mechanics and aesthetics were used in reviews with partly or completely other meanings. That does not mean the MDA-framework cannot be applied to the reviews, in fact the reviewers sometimes decomposed the game in a similar way to how the MDA-framework would when describing Hades's combat. For example, the Polygon review [42] describes how they would encounter different boons that offer different upgrades, which would lead to different playstyles, which in turn would sometimes lead to a build that would make them feel powerful. That feeling of power being an aesthetic, even if not included in Hunicke et al.'s examples [22]. Other aesthetics observed in the reviews include but are not limited to: sensation, fantasy, narrative, challenge and submission. Future projects could work on applying the MDA-framework to the guidelines developed by this project, to further clarify them.

# 7

## Conclusion

### 7.1 Evaluation of results

The purpose of this project was to examine how award-winning games captivate their audiences. This was done by completing a thematic analysis of written Hades reviews. The results of the analysis were used to construct eight guidelines that could help in development of new games. In addition to this, a demo to illustrate the guidelines was developed as well. Both the thematic analysis and the guidelines were completed, answering the question of why people like Hades, and thereby fulfilling the main purpose of the report. The demo did cover some of the guidelines, but not to the extent that it feels completed. The guidelines which were worked on were “Build on the player’s prior knowledge”, “Actions and combat should feel satisfying”, and “Use Aesthetics to add a new layer of immersion”. With that said, there is room for further improvement which will be discussed in Section 7.3.

### 7.2 Evaluation of documentation of code extracts

When collecting all extracts for each code, a unified approach was not agreed on before starting. Different group members were responsible for gathering extracts for different codes, and chose different documentation levels. All extracts contained the relevant text extracts, as well as surrounding sentences to clarify the context, but not all had documentation to show from which review in the dataset they were gathered from, or when they were gathered. The full extent of the problem was only realised when assembling the final appendixes, where all the text extracts are sorted under their corresponding theme. After an internal discussion it was decided to present only the text extracts in the appendix. This was to give the appendix a homogeneous appearance, and was found to be a more time efficient approach than finding the missing sources. All examples presented in the results are presented with their respective source.

If we were to redo the thematic analysis, we should agree on an approach before starting to collect text extracts. The approach should clarify which documentation to gather along with the text extract, as well as how to format the documentation around the extract. This would have made it easier to build and format the appendixes for the report.

### 7.3 Future work

Future work should further investigate how the guidelines could be applied on a more mechanical level, to ensure that they are easy to apply in practice. Currently, several examples are included in the documentation of the guidelines in an effort to ensure that the reader understands what they entail (see Appendix A). Those examples could have been broken down into building blocks, or a more detailed step-by-step guide. This could be done partly with the MDA-framework, but something more suited to a narrative structure should be used in parallel. To find a better framework to use for storytelling, literary and cinematic guides could be explored, since those fields have more experience within storytelling.

As mentioned in 6.1, the games which were looked at in comparison with Hades were games which we had some previous experience with. Looking at a larger number of games with more variation, in genre, types of developers, and other factors, is something which could help solidify the results and validate the guidelines further. It could also be of interest to perform a similar analysis on a different award-winning game and comparing the results of the two.

As the demo was not completed, future work could include further development of the demo. This should include incorporating more guidelines as well as playtesting. Currently the demo has only been tested by authors. Non-biased testers can come with useful feedback and insight that those heavily involved in the game making process cannot test. For example, the game developers can make some guesses about how well the game explains mechanics in an understandable way, but in the end they will be biased. They lack the perspective of an outsider not already familiar with the game.

### 7.4 Summary

This project examined how award-winning games captivate their audiences. It did this by first performing a thematic analysis on written reviews of the game Hades, and then used the result to construct eight guidelines on how to create a captivating game. The result of the thematic analysis showed that what players recognised in particular as good in Hades were its story, gameplay and aesthetics, and especially how the story and gameplay were intertwined, which created something that was more than the sum of its parts. The guidelines were created around these results, and a demo was built in an attempt to illustrate some of them. Other games were looked at in comparison with the guidelines in an effort to validate them. This comparison showed that some of the guidelines were universally applicable, while others depended on the intention and priority of the game's design. Finally, this report discussed some of the ethics surrounding character design, as well as evaluated of parts of the method.

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# A Guidelines

# Guidelines for Captivating Games

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## Introduction:

These guidelines are based on the research done in the bachelor thesis *How Award-winning Games Captivate their Audiences*, which can be found (KÅLLA). The thesis contains a thematic analysis that was made on reviews of the game Hades.

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide insight into what players might enjoy and appreciate in games that they play. It is important to note that since these guidelines are based on Hades, many of them relate to aspects found in Hades that might not be found, or wanted, in other games. Though some guidelines are more general, as they cover aspects that are relevant for most types of games. They are not an exhaustive list of what makes a good game, nor is it guaranteed that if implemented these will create a good game.

In the examples that will be provided for each guideline, the games Hades, The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild, Have a Nice Death, Binding of Isaac, Hollow Knight and Mega Man X can be found. Note that these examples might include spoilers for the games mentioned, and will also assume some knowledge of the mentioned games.

## Intertwine story and game mechanics

*Intertwining of story and game mechanics* is when mechanics, such as weapons, runs, upgrades, and more are explained in the story through dialogue with the characters and the lore of the game. The player should not be left wondering why they are doing something, or why they have access to upgrades, weapons, abilities and more. All of this should be clearly defined and explained to the players through the story, dialogue, and lore. This contributes to creating immersion, which many players seem to appreciate in games.

### Examples:

Intertwining of story and game mechanics was one of the key things the thesis found that players were praising about **Hades**. It was mentioned in almost all reviews, and always in a positive light. Some examples of how intertwining of story and game mechanics is done in Hades, and other games, can be found below.

In Hades, the mirror of night is used to purchase permanent upgrades for Zagreus. The upgrades include things like extra lives during runs, or extra damage to undamaged foes and more. These are purely mechanical, but there is a clear explanation in the story as to why Zagreus has access to these upgrades. The reason you have the mirror is because of Nyx. She wants Zagreus to have access to these upgrades in order to get stronger, so that he can escape the underworld.



After dying when attempting to escape Hades, Zagreus respawns in the House of Hades by walking out from the Styx, the river that, in Greek mythology, divides the underworld from earth. Here, Supergiant uses Greek mythology to explain the roguelike structure of the game (respawning at the games start when dying), as well as why Zagreus respawn in the House of Hades specifically (Hades being the god of the underworld in Greek mythology).

Getting new weapon aspects is woven in as part of the story and lore. The weapon aspect gives a weapon new effects, and often changes its attacks. To unlock these the player has to talk to a number of characters in the game, and when certain requirements are met, they will teach you a phrase to say to a specific weapon. Chaos, for example, teaches Zagreus the phrase *“I see you stand your ground against the serpent's flame. A waking-phrase, to which you and the all-seeing artifact of my creation may respond.”*, which allows you to unlock the shield's hidden aspect. The picture below shows Chaos commenting on Zagreus carrying the shield with that new aspect.



The *Codex of the underworld*, which you receive from Achilles, gives the player information about the many different creatures, gods, and weapons. In the game it serves to give players more information about these things. Depicted below is an entry from this codex.



In *Have a Nice Death*, there is also an in-game wiki and guide for characters, attacks, and more. It is called the Employees Handbook, which plays in nicely with the Death Inc. giant corporation that serves as the game's setting. An example from this wiki can be seen below.



In **Breath of the Wild**, many players encounter the character Hestu early in the game. When talking to him he will ask them to fetch his maracas which have been stolen by some monsters nearby. After retrieving them they are found to be empty, Hestu remarks that the koroks must have stolen the korok seeds he has in the maracas and are probably hiding waiting for him to find them. If the player has korok seeds on them they can give them to Hestu and he will in turn give you another inventory slot for your weapons. This is a fairly intricate story and scenario that explains a few mechanics and elements for the player. Namely what the koroks seeds do, expand the players inventory, and why the player should collect them, to help Hestu as well as expand their inventory.





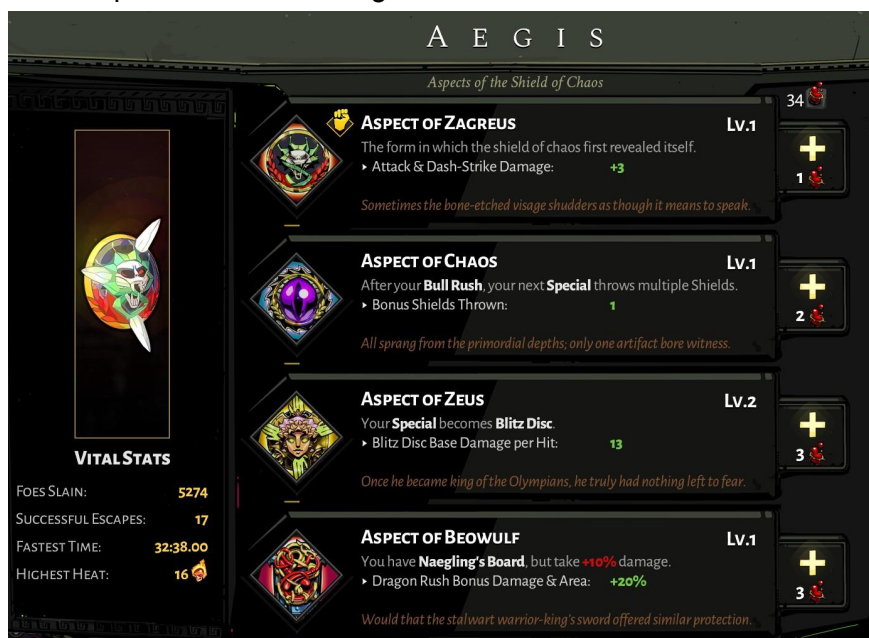
## Cater to multiple playstyles

Games are usually defined by genre, which lets the player know approximately what to expect gameplay wise. But even within these genres players appreciate the game supporting different playstyles. Catering to different playstyles could incentivise multiple playthroughs and give the game more longevity by giving the player variation. It also gives players, who might not typically enjoy a particular genre, a reason to play the specific game.

Examples:

**Hades** offers a total of six different weapons, some are melee-based, some are ranged, and some offer a mix of both. Stay far away and kite enemies with a bow, or dive headfirst into the fray with a sword; the choice is yours. Aegis, the Shield of Chaos, for example lets you fight up close but also lets you channel your inner Captain America by throwing it, causing it to bounce from enemy to enemy. Every weapon even has multiple variants which means that those who favour only the bow, for example, still have multiple options.

See the picture below for Aegis's different variants.



**Breath of the Wild** also caters to multiple playstyles. It not only offers multiple weapons, almost all issues the player faces in the game can be approached from multiple angles. For example when faced with a group of monsters the player can choose how to handle that encounter. They can fight with several different melee weapons, sometimes paired with a shield, in close combat or from a longer distance with a bow and arrow. They can sometimes choose an unconventional way, like rolling giant boulders down a hill at them, dropping metal crates onto them or shooting down lanterns at explosive barrels. The player may also walk the long way around, or with a disguise sneak through the group. When exploring a castle, the player can follow the paths or climb over the walls. Start from the bottom or fly in from the top. The list is extensive.

## Incentivise players to change and vary playstyle

To incentivise the players to change playstyle means that the game should encourage the player to try out new things and different combinations of upgrades. This can lead to players discovering enjoyment in other playstyles that they otherwise would not have tried. For players who like to switch around, having the ability to choose a weapon, ability, or power up with some random variable that gives the player something extra could add to the experience. This also makes the game less monotonous for the player, allowing them to enjoy it longer, adding further to a game's longevity.

Examples:

In **Hades** you get to choose between 6 different weapons, after you have unlocked them all, at the start of your run. One of these weapons carry an effect called *Dark Thirst* which gives you 20% extra darkness, an in-game currency, during that run. For many players this is a good incentive to play with different weapons and for some it might result in a new favourite weapon. The picture below shows the sword, the leftmost weapon, with dark thirst.



Another incentive in Hades comes from the prophecies on Upgrades and Boons. During each escape attempt Zagreus is presented by offerings from the gods of Olympus. These offerings, referred to as Boons, act as power-ups for the player. When the *Fated List of Minor Prophecies* has been purchased the player will be awarded for choosing boons they have not chosen before. The picture below shows three boons given from Athena with the top two boons showing the prophecy icon next to the boon's name.



In **Breath of the Wild** the player's weapons will break after a certain amount of use. This forces the player to use another weapon, often picking up the closest option they can find, generally from a defeated monster. Since different areas in the game have different monsters, the player will cycle through a wide variety of weapons.

**Binding of Isaac** has mostly randomised run-temporary upgrades, where the player cannot entirely control their build, but this randomization still forces the player to test multiple upgrades. By doing this, the player gets to test multiple playstyles.

**Mega Man X** has numerous different weapons which are acquired by defeating the different bosses in the game. Each weapon has its own strengths and weaknesses, and it is up to the player to figure out what works best in each situation. Sometimes, more than one weapon will be effective against certain enemies and bosses, so the player is indirectly encouraged to try different paths during their playthrough.



## Build on the players prior knowledge

Building on the player's prior knowledge is a way to ease the player into the game world and the gameplay. It can also make the player feel smart being able to use their previous knowledge to solve a puzzle or challenge. There are multiple ways to build on players' prior knowledge, and a vast amount of things the players' can be knowledgeable about. One example of things the players can have prior knowledge in are stories, such as tropes, myths, or legends. Some games use early levels to teach the player certain game mechanics or patterns in order to prepare the players' for more difficult levels later in the game.

### Examples:

Both the gameplay and the story in **Hades** uses previous knowledge the player either has since before playing the game or knowledge they gain during the game. Many are familiar with the Greek myths and gods and those who are not will still recognise many story beats as they are distinctly familiar for most humans. The gameplay also builds on the knowledge the player gains during play. In all of the different sections of the game you meet enemies that prepare you for the upcoming boss fights. This can be most clearly seen in Elysium with the large so-called Nemean Chariot, whose bull rush is the same as the one of Asterius attacks, Asterius being a boss the player has to defeat to exit that game area. This means that even before you meet the boss you are familiar with their attacks and how to handle them. See photo below for bull rush.



In **Breath of the Wild** lightning during bad weather will strike metal weapons and objects, building on the player's knowledge of real world physics. Similarly, metal objects can be moved with magnetic powers. The picture sequence below shows lightning striking a metal sword.



The setting of **Have a Nice Death** is the underworld, where souls end up after dying in the real world. This setting connects to the guideline "Builds on players prior knowledge", as it is a place which has been portrayed in various media, and is also a place described in many

religions. A trope which is found in both games is the concept that the God of Death has to deal with a lot of paperwork in connection with new souls arriving to the underworld. In Hades it is shown as a part of the everyday work of the god Hades and a number of Shades, something which the main character Zagreus shows a distaste for. By comparison, the main character in HaND is shown to be fed up with the way the paperwork is currently being handled, as he at one point gets buried by the stacks of paper.

In **Mega Man X**, the player is introduced to many of the game's different obstacles during the introduction sequence. The game builds on these obstacles and the player should be able recognize dangers and patterns moving forward in the game. Seeing how the game is the tenth game in the Mega Man series, veterans will be prepared for its overall structure.

## Game Feel: Actions and combat should feel satisfying

Action, combat, and all other parts of gameplay should feel good and satisfying for the player to create a more enjoyable experience overall. This can be done by adding visual- and sound-effects when the player attacks, dash, and perform other similar actions, as well as timing the animation appropriately with when the player initiated the action. Exactly what will work for a specific game is something which should be playtested thoroughly, as this varies from game to game. The examples mentioned below can be seen as references or inspiration. Note that because these examples were chosen by the authors of this document, the examples reflect our personal opinions and perhaps not that of the average players.

### Examples:

Aesthetics (see more under *Use Aesthetic to add a new layer of immersion*) can be used to create a better game feel. The dash in **Hades**, which many players have described as satisfying, might not be as satisfying without its sound, animation and visual effects. The attacks in Hades are also accompanied with visual and sound effects that add to their appeal.

Another **Hades** example is how if the player manoeuvres the enemy into being hit by a trap, the trap will deal a great deal of damage to the enemy. By increasing the damage of the traps, the player is rewarded for strategizing and pulling off a harder play, requiring both patience and timing. This makes the action feel more satisfying. See photo below for example of a trap kill.



In **Breath of the Wild** a headshot is accompanied by a DING sound. This makes hitting the shot more satisfying, as the player is rewarded for hitting a harder target than a bodyshot. There is also a function where if the player correctly times an evasive manoeuvre when fighting an enemy, time will slow down allowing the player to get in multiple hits before time returns to normal speed and the enemy can attack again. This is called a Flurry rush.



**Mega Man X** utilises tight controls, and an effective dash mechanic to make the game feel smooth and responsive. Blasting away at enemies with different and increasingly powerful weapons feels nothing short of satisfying. Enemies explode into pieces when you destroy them, and the accompanying sound effects make the actions and combat feel amazing.

## Use Aesthetics to add a new layer of immersion

Music and art are often used to present the world of the game, building an atmosphere for the player to be immersed. These form the aesthetics(not to be confused with the definition from MDA) of the game setting the tone and feel of the game world, which is vital for an immersive game. The aesthetics should be cohesive, through all aspects of the game, in order to not break the immersion. This, like Game Feel, is something that should ideally be developed using playtesting. The examples mentioned below can be seen as references or inspiration. Note that because these examples were chosen by the authors of this document, the examples reflect our personal opinions and perhaps not that of the average players.

### Examples:

Here we will showcase several games we believe have a cohesive aesthetic that provide more immersion for the game. While the music can not be shown here effectively it is recommended to listen to the soundtrack for all games showcased below.

#### Hades:

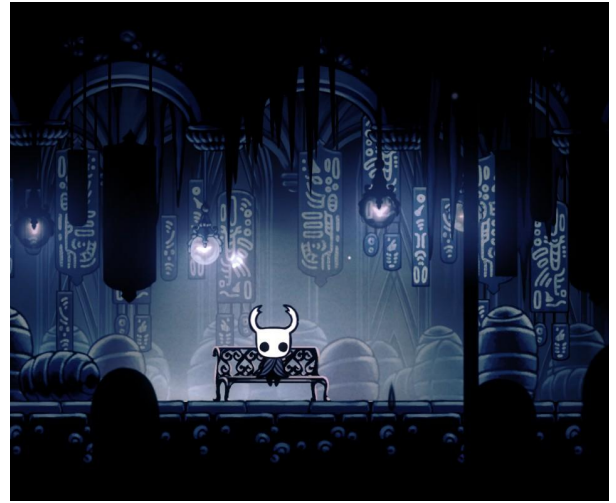
Hades is filled with vibrant colours and living environments. The portraits shown when talking to the different characters suit the style of the rest of the game, the voice acting is another factor that also adds to the cohesive aesthetic. Everything fits together and blends into one cohesive experience. For example the lava filled section Asphodel uses both colour as well as sound to immerse the player. The warm orange, reds and yellows, as well as the lava bubbles popping makes it so that the environment radiates with heat.







## Hollow Knight



Hollow Knight has not been talked about in the study but is an excellent example of cohesive and immersive aesthetics. The game has a clear colour palette for all the different sections, three which are shown in the pictures. They use this as well as music and sound effects to immerse the player into the environment, making them feel as if they are a little bug exploring the deep underground.

In the section Green path, see the leftmost picture, the music is encouraging, positive and soft. The environment is lush with vibrant green, blue and purple plants. Vines hang down from the ceilings and bushes and moss cover most of the floor. This verdant section is compared to many others filled with life.

The cold blue and gray colours in the upper right picture evoke a cold stillness. The mist behind also adds to the cold feeling. There is almost no music in this area but if you turn up the volume you can hear the chatter of traveling bugs of the past. This adds an eerie and gloomy aesthetic to the environment.

Serene and calm music with soft metallic thunks plays in Crystal Peaks, see the bottom rightmost picture. When close to the conveyor belts there is also another mechanical sound effect to show that the machinery is still active. The section also contains much of the deep blue shade many of the other cavernous sections have, but here they also accentuate with pink and purple crystals. This adds a mystical and magical feeling to the section.



**The Binding of Isaac** uses a simple and cartoony artstyle despite covering serious themes, which adds to the satirical elements of the game. This can be seen in the pictures below.



### **Mega Man X**

Mega Man X puts a lot of emphasis on its soundtrack. Each level has its own unique theme, and the music switches once the player fends off bosses. The high energy of the music fits the gameplay well, and the sound effects add that extra touch to make the player feel completely immersed in action.

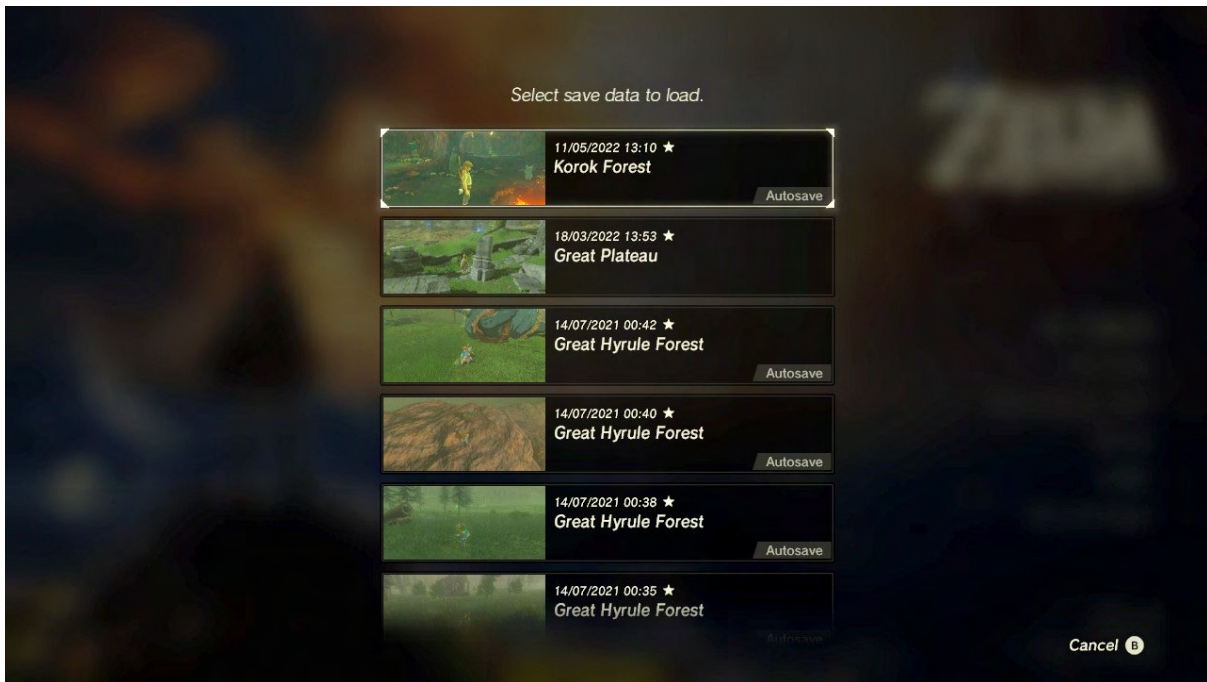
## Respect the player's time

For many players games are a recreational activity or hobby. The player should therefore be allowed to choose their commitment level, being able to dive into some parts of the game while ignoring others, as best fits in their schedule. This also means they should be able to quit the game without having to worry about losing too much of their progress. Everything the player does in-game should have a purpose, everything should be meaningful in some way, or lead to some sort of progress, whether that is as lore and story, upgrades, or bringing the player closer to a goal. An in-game purpose can also be to just have fun.

### Examples:

In **Hades** the player can pause or save the game at any time, which lets the player start a new run without having to fear losing their progress if they are interrupted, as well as not having to schedule a large chunk of time for it. This is also true for both **Have a Nice Death** as well as **Breath of the Wild**.





Another **Hades** example is how every run leads to some sort of progress, even if being defeated by the first enemy. When Zagreus dies he respawns in the House of Hades, where he can talk to different characters, which progresses the story and lets the player find more out about the characters. Moreover, if the player clears a few rooms but dies before defeating the final boss, they will still keep some of the permanent currencies which they can use to upgrade themselves, strengthening Zagreus for his next escape attempt.

**Breath of the Wild** is a nonlinear game where the player can largely do things in their own order. This means a player can start a quest, explore a mountain, start another quest, clear out an enemy encampment, and then finish the first quest. Because of this, the player can do things in their own order, and do what they find fun. If regretting starting a quest, the player is not obliged to finish it before they can start another.

## Incentivise the player to do what they enjoy

Giving the player an additional reason to play the parts they enjoy in a game is the meaning of this last guideline. This can be done by offering some sort of reward or progress when completing the activity. Do notice that there is a difference between this and certain, so called, dark design patterns. See the Dark design pattern *Play by Appointment* from *Dark Patterns in the Design of Games* for further explanations, see source below. The focus should be on players playing the game because they inherently enjoy it.

**Source:** Zagal, J.P., Björk, S. & Lewis, C. 2013. *Dark Patterns in the Design of Games. Foundations of Digital Games 2013, May 14-17, 2013, Crete, Greece.*

### Examples:

There are several incentives in **Hades** that incentivise the player to do what they enjoy. Every run the player progresses the story further, both during the run and when the player returns to the House of Hades. Even if the player dies the story still progresses. The characters in Hades that the player can talk with always have something new to say. Hades also features permanent upgrades that make the player stronger through a mechanic called The mirror of night. These upgrades are purchased with a currency called Darkness which players can get as a reward for clearing rooms when doing a run of the game. A picture of the mirror of night can be seen under examples of the Guideline Intertwine Story and Gameplay.

In **Breath of the Wild** there are several puzzles found around the world that reveal a Korok which in turn gives you a Korok seed. These can be used to purchase additional inventory slots for weapons and shields. The puzzles themselves are enjoyable, according to the authors, and here the korok seed acts as an incentive to keep the player doing these puzzles. (See below for an example, left figure shows the unsolved puzzle, right the solved)



Another example from **Breath of the Wild** is how the game world is filled with small rewards. Almost every mountain, beach, forest, enemy encampment, and village has some sort of reward for the player to discover. This can be in the form of a small puzzle at the top of a mountain, a chest hidden in the sand on a beach or fruits to pick in a forest. This means that almost whatever the player chooses to do, they will be rewarded for it.



The example above shows a Korok hiding under a rock at the top of a mountain.

# B

## List of Assets used in Demo

Assets		
Name	Publisher	Link
Shiba	zixisun51	<a href="#">Sketchfab page</a>
Low Poly Park	Polygon-Park	<a href="#">Asset store link</a>
Office Room Furniture	Elcanetay	<a href="#">Asset store link</a>
Decrepit Dungeon LITE	Prodigious Creations	<a href="#">Asset store link</a>
Locker Room Props	VIS Games	<a href="#">Asset store link</a>
Hamstercage	VIS Games	<a href="#">Asset store link</a>
Giant Animations FREE	Kevin Iglesias	<a href="#">Asset store link</a>
Old Rusted Bowl	Game-Ready Studios	<a href="#">Asset store link</a>
Simplistic Low Poly Nature	Acorn Bringer	<a href="#">Asset store link</a>
Living Birds	dinopunch	<a href="#">Asset store link</a>
Dog Knight PBR Polyart	Dungeon Mason	<a href="#">Asset store link</a>
Free chibi cat	Ladymito	<a href="#">Asset store link</a>
Philip Winsnes	Soundtrack	

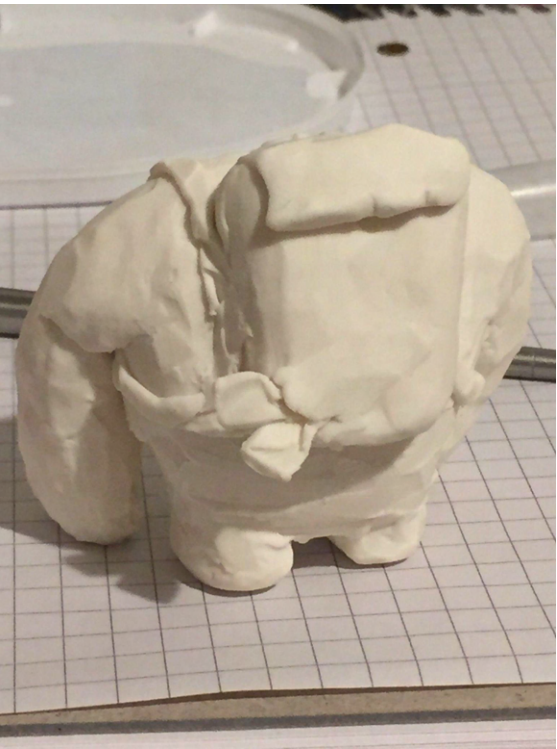
**Table B.1:** List of assets used in the demo





# C

## Clay Figure Images







# D

## Amateur reviews

### D.1 Steam

# Reviews collected from steam

Reviewers' names have been removed to preserve their anonymity.

s1:

I get killed.

Return back to the beginning, only to get to know the characters.

Then the addiction of trying to escape again kicks in....

And it gets late....

Just going to try one more time.

I also need items!

Lovely art! All the characters looks dynamic and have good designs that fits them. Like how some random colour dots of green and purple makes everything so vibrant.

The areas looks cool, and stylish. Fits the games gener and its story. Pleasing to look at. But I hate lava. :S

Chatchy music, it gets stuck in your head. But not mindblowing.

Good voice acting, each character has a perfect voice for their sprite. Either soft-spoken, boastful etc. Still have some feeling of softness in it. Or maybe there are no voice actors and the characters actually the ones who speak! ( Plottwist )

Still have lingering addiction to this game. "I want to play Hades"

Despite how frustrating and repetitive it can be. Stills gives a thrill of each try.

And farming .. Getting enough, and then the reward for it. Sometimes it feels like I don't get anything at all cause I require more nectar or gems than each run gives.

Yet I want to know the story and the characters. To 100% it.

And is fun to fight enemies ~~

When I wrote this review, I was at 51 h .. Now at 113 h

I still haven't completed all the side stories yet ... Hoping for the the dialouge to show up can feel like an eternity. Heh.

s2:

I REALLY wish I didn't have to put a thumbs up or thumbs down on this. But sadly, my overall opinion would tend towards "not recommended," at least for me.

I remember after playing Bastion a long time ago, I wanted an endless mode because I liked it so much.

Hades plays pretty much like that, which is nice. The characters are likable, the voice acting and aesthetic are on point - all the usual SuperGiant stuff.

I try to meet every game where it's at, and not judge it too much off expectations or "it's not enough like \_\_\_\_."But I'm going to break my own rules and do that here.

Seems like a lot of media tried framing this game as having "fixed" the roguelike genre, but I think it actually pulls out some of the worst bits of it. Especially being someone who prefers

roguelikes \*without\* persistent upgrades. As I'd rather have the emphasis on skill development, over grinding. Give me a sandbox to master, not a hamster wheel to run.

Hades unfortunately is similar to something like Rogue Legacy, where it begins to feel grindy and padded after a point. Unlike Isaac - a game that does unlocks and mandatory multiple playthroughs pretty well - where there's a ridiculous amount of new stuff to find after every run .

...but Hades' well runs dry after a point. At least, gameplay-wise. The characters have a lot to say, but that feels like a cheap carrot on a stick, rather than a real incentive.

Though I suppose that isn't terrible if you just want to play more of the game. But at that point I'd rather just play something new. Or Devil May Cry 5, again.

In summation: Hades works as an action game, and is good for one completion. But doesn't really have the factor that makes most roguelikes click, for me.

s3

The game somehow does both story and good repeatable gameplay at the same time. Every run through the game's 4 levels is different due to the many varied power-ups, both permanent and temporary, that you as the player have to choose from. That, coupled with several different weapons and the fantastic array of characters you meet along the way, makes this game a solid 10/10. And I didn't even mention the outstanding soundtrack.

s4:

Just to add my positive review to the pile: Hades has been one of the most addictive games I've played in a while, in the best sense of the word.

In the first few runs, it might be hard to spot any significant progress, or it might seem very difficult to even enjoy it. But the gorgeous visuals, the great voice acting, the satisfying and tight gameplay and the glimpses into the lore will entice you to keep up playing.

Then, the huge number of upgrades, weapons, synergies, dialogues, challenges, modifiers, etc... will make you stay and enjoy it like a kid. Once you get into it, you have to play A LOT before it feels repetitive. The fact that each dialogue is voice acted and that I've rarely heard the same line twice in +60h still amazes me.

Hades has all the stuff that makes Supergiant's games awesome, but it's fourteen times bigger and with almost infinite replayability. Very recommended.

s5:

Hades is and always will be one of my favorite games ever. I bought it a year ago on Switch because as a greek myths fan, I was curious. I've never regretted it, and I don't regret buying



it again on Steam so I can now also play it on my computer. As someone who usually doesn't like roguelikes, Hades has reconciled with me the genre because of all the ways the game makes your life easier if you're having a hard time with it. And of course, the story and characters alone are completely worth buying this game. The music, voice acting, the graphisme, everything is perfect. I have literally no complaints about Hades, except that's a little bit /too/ good, lol.

s6:

If you're wondering if all of the praise that this game has received from gamers and critics alike is warranted - yes, yes it is. There aren't enough good things to say about this game but I'm gonna try. TL:DR easily on the best games ever, get it and play it!

This is one of those rare games where not a single thing is at merely an acceptable level. Everything is absolutely awesome. Everyone has praised this game enough already but whatever, I'm gonna do it anyway. Here goes:

- The combat alone is amazing and the game is a must-play just for that. It's fast, varied, tactical, flashy, intuitive and super fun. One of the best Dungeon Crawlers ever.
- The visuals are breathtaking, with an amazingly distinctive visual style courtesy of the hand drawn environments and beautifully animated characters. Visually stunning without relying on demanding graphics. Style above all else.
- The story and characters are beautifully written. The tale unfolds slowly with each attempt you make, characters acknowledge your past deeds and each conversation with them is meaningful. The story is faithful to Greek mythology and remains original and unpredictable at the same time. They even bothered to explain the roguelike elements like the ever changing levels and your ability to die over and over again in the story and I love it when devs do that. Not to mention that all of this is leveraged by the absolutely stellar voice acting.
- The music and sound design are incredible. Each hit is accentuated perfectly and every environment is enriched greatly by the ambiance. The soundtrack is godly, nothing less, I will never get enough of it, no matter how many times I hear it.
- The roguelike elements serve their purpose incredibly well. A perfect blend of permanent progression and randomized items and upgrades lost on death means that each run is unique and engaging, but you can also feel yourself progressing and becoming stronger. What all of this means is that the game warrants being played again and again and again which is great, considering how fun it is.

OK, I think that's enough, you get the picture. I only played this game for so little but I can already confidently say, I love everything about it. It's a Dungeon Crawler. It's a roguelike. It's an action RPG. And it excels at all of those and then some. Don't hesitate and buy this game ASAP, you are doing yourself a disservice by not playing it!

s7:

The first few hours dedicated to beat the final boss are perfect. Good learning curve, new weapons unlocking, learning each biome, and the game is gorgeous. And then I beat the boss.

And after that the game sadly turns into the most boring grindfest I've ever seen in a decent roguelite. Same levels, same bosses, no surprises, no alternate paths, no secrets. Just do it over and over again for a couple of bloods and diamonds in order to upgrade a couple of things, and then do it again.

I'll recommend the game for the first part (up to killing the end boss) because the game is incredible and rewarding then, but after that I'll say this is a very poor roguelite with regard to replayability. The content just gets old very fast. The only new stuff is dialogue lines, and while they may lead to a few new gadgets, we're still talking about a few more dozens of runs just to see it through, replaying the exact same content.

Coming from Isaac and Dead Cells, this is seriously lacking and does not provide enough content to justify the tons of runs on the very same content required to unlock the aspects and advance the stories. Supergiant has once again created a game with masterful narrative, visuals, music, voices, story, gameplay, but they have not handled the roguelite aspect very well.

So: a very good and short action game, or a very limited and repetitive roguelite. The devs have specified they don't want to add new biomes (only the 4), but I'll still keep my fingers crossed for some magical new content with the stable release.

s8:

If you're browsing this section looking for a negative review, know that this is more of a "mixed" grade. The game has some really strong points, all of which have been praised in detail elsewhere, so I'll focus instead on what I primarily believe holds the game back.

### 1. A focus on Meta-Progression

The game has several resources that you will collect during gameplay runs. Those resources are then spent between runs, either for upgrades, cosmetics, or advancing the story/lore. This meta progression is a "hook": it drives new players to gather as many of those resources as possible, to unlock all of the content. The game essentially drip-feeds content to keep the player invested, run after run.

Often, you'll want to pursue a quest with a particular character, who will be conveniently absent until a few more runs, as an attempt to pad the game's length. Often, collecting those resources will be more important than picking options that are good for your current run. Once you have all the upgrades, all of these resources lose their meaning entirely. Locking upgrades behind a dozen hours of grind is not content; and adds to the feeling that the game lacks content overall (see below)

### 2. The game's difficulty "levels" range from extremely easy to withholding "fun"

Unfortunately, the illusion of progress quickly wears off; and you realize the game lies to you about its difficulty. Upgrades make you significantly stronger, so much so that your first loss won't occur due to a lack of skill or game knowledge, but because you did not unlock the upgrades. After unlocking more powerful stats, leveling trinkets and finally getting

companions, you'll notice that the game is actually way easier than it used to be: Extra lives, double the HP, almost double the damage, stronger weapons, summon gold and health from thin air...

Later in the game, you can increase the difficulty level incrementally by adding modifiers, also known as "Heat" Some of those modifiers are fun. They make enemies stronger, faster, more numerous, more challenging, even adding new patterns to bosses. But past a certain level of heat, there are modifiers that do the opposite: they reduce player choice, they remove content. Less upgrades, upgrades that are more costly, having to sell your upgrades every level, introducing a time limit... Higher difficulties significantly reduce player choice, and the balance of the different gods amplifies the issue, with only a handful of viable builds

### 3. There isn't enough variation or content

The game's layout stays relatively the same. There are 4 levels you go through. The enemy types are always the same, the bosses have slight variations (after tinkering with difficulty) with the final boss being identical every run. Upgrades are split between equal amounts of "Transformative" effects that change how the weapons behave and promote peculiar strategies, and the other half of upgrades being unoriginal, linear upgrade playstyles, or straight up useless.

The variation is supposed to lie within the weapon choice, the randomized upgrades and the combination of effects from gods themselves, but they end up being a one-time curiosity. This limited amount of biomes, enemies, bosses and gods results result in a lower replay value than titles in the same genre. After the time dedicated to unlocks has been expended, the "true" game beneath is too similar from playthrough to playthrough.

The current game is a strong foundation, but needs more of everything to enter the pantheon of roguelikes. Past the initial hook of checking unlock boxes, one might be entertained for a 100 runs, but another will be done in a dozen or so.

s9:

can pet doggo A+

s10:

You can pet cerberus. 10/10

s11:

good game can pet cerberus

s12:

When you die, you return home and pet the dog.

s13:

you can pet the big dog

s14:

You can pet best boy cerberus

s15:

hot men

s16:

everyone is so hot

s17:

everyone is hot

10/10

s19:

everyone is sexy

s20:

god I want megaera to step on me

s21:

good game, Ares is hot

s22:

11/10

This game deserves all the awards it won. Seriously.

The music is 10/10. So good I actively listen to it outside the game.

Voice acting is perfect.

The gameplay is addictive. Combat mechanics feels amazing.

And finally, the story dusts everything in gold.

It's layers of all the things I love in a game and I 100% recommend it. Paying full price for this game will never feel like wasted money.

s23:

In the name of someone very sore right now, would escape again...

The music is so good that you'll stop playing and just listen.

## D.2 Metacritic

# Reviews collected from Metacritic

Reviewers' names have been removed to preserve their anonymity. Please note that the reviews were scored on a scale of 0-10, where a score of 0-4 represented a negative score, 5-7 a mixed score and 8-10 a positive score.

m1:

Score: 10

This game is amazing! A fantastical history with a incredible gameplay. All of the players need to play this rogue like.

m2:

Score: 10

In so few cases does narrative shine through in a roguelike/roguelite, but Supergiant have absolutely nailed it with Hades, each death (and you will die, a lot) allows you to bring forward resources to increase your survivability, having the cast of characters about the house of Hades comment on your last run and how you met your grizzly end makes the world feel lived in and quickly gives insight to who these people are, pair that with frenetic fast paced combat, game changing divine boons that synergise in all kinds of weird and wonderful ways, a charming cast of characters brought to life by a stellar voice cast and you're on to another Supergiant classic.

I've put countless hours into this while in early access on PC, I'm so happy to have it on the switch so I can bring it on the go with me.

Best of the Genre since The Binding of Isaac.

m3:

Score: 10

Perfect gameplay loop keeps you wanting to try one more run. Storybthat continues to expand in a meaningful way; doesn't feel padded.

Excellent controls, voice acting and music. Perfect balance of challenge and meaningful ability unlocks and upgrades.

Buy this game

m4:

Score: 10

A "revolution" in the roguelite genre, thanks to an always progressing character driven narrative that deepens as you loop (die) over and over. Familiarizing yourself with the symbols attached to the paths made available as you go, means you don't feel like your runs are being dictated by RNG alone, and that means you can slightly guide yourself to some amazing builds within the gameplay loop. Boons (power ups) come by way of the many Olympic deities you call family, and that personal touch will likely result in you playing favorites... which can come with it's own surprises.

Probably Supergiant's best, and most accessible, game to-date. (Though Pyre remains my favorite.)

m5:

Score: 10

What a masterpiece! From the voice acting, to the level design, music, progression and story... I don't have enough words to praise this game as it deserves. Get it on the first chance you can and play it to completion, no need to thank me later.

m6:

Score: 10

Truly a labor of love! Hades is the result of Supergiant Games taking the high bar they set for themselves with previous releases (Bastion, Transistor, Pyre) and raising it even higher. Any roguelike fans, action fans, greek mythology fans, or anyone who just appreciates a rock solid game with beauty art and sound design MUST check out Hades. Phenomenal!

m7:

Score: 9

Ok, this one got me. I'm normally not the rogue-like-type. Too repetitive, too frustrating. Normally. Hades somehow managed to glue me to the screen for at least 30 hours, till i got my first run complete.

Why? It could be because of the excellent controls, the more than solid mechanics and combat, the well thought upgrade-paths, the way it makes random, repetitive content feel unique by constantly delivering meaningful variations. But all that was delivered on the same level by other games.



So what's the difference? For me it's the production values and the narrative. The outstanding artwork, the great and original story, the well written characters, the numberless references to greek mythology, the eye-winking irony, the speaker cast. And: the soundtrack! Everything is done with so much love for detail, originality and feel for great mature entertainment. The motivation to start over with the 40 th run here is not simply to master a challenge but to find out what waits beyond the temple of Styx and how the story develops.

All in all a pretty unique and masterful turn on a not-so-much-loved genre. Well done Supergiant Games. And not for the 1st time ...

m8:

Score: 10

Great game. It is nailing the gameplay loop to make it fun and addictive. After every run you go to the hub and even if you did not succeeded, you will have some new dialogues, events, you will upgrade the character, unlock new weapon... something new will happen almost every time. (its not like returnal, where if you dont kill the next boss, you loose all the progress. You progress and continue uncovering lore even if you keep dying. And that is great motiavtion to keep going and makes the game much less frustrating). And once you unlock the upgrades, you just want to start again to see how it affects next run. So you keep doing this loop (unlock new stuff, test new stuff) until next morning :-D

m9:

Score: 9

Hades is incredibly fun and immersive! Never a dull moment, the action is fast-paced yet the game play is surprisingly well balanced, not frustratingly difficult but gives enough challenge to motivate the player to move forward. The graphics are colorful and well-drawn, plus the characters are all interesting and given life with decent voice-acting. Controls are intuitive and responsive, movements are fluid, and load times between areas are tolerable. There are also a variety of weapons and skills to suit the style of the player, the bow is really fun so far. The only negative is the repetitive nature of the game that forces the player to grind, but its not as bothersome due to the fast-paced action, variety of monsters, traps and rewards. There is also a "handicap" system, that allows the player to customize various difficulty options to earn important items to unlock weapon abilities, and gift to each character to advance their own story lines. Overall, Hades is a superb quality game from Supergiant, well worth the price and sets a benchmark for future games.

Update: After 50+ "deaths", finally reached the ending, the story is well told that even the game credits will keep you watching. And will keep playing the game to unlock more story lines and weapon aspects.

m10:

Score: 10

Fantastic game. Played it on Xbox One X and it is fast, beautiful and seriously addictive. I have finished Dead Cells, Hollow Knight, The Ascent, Children of Morta, etc, and it is by far the best one..

One small warning: A serious time sink.

m11:

Score: 7

I had fun with this for the 15-20 hours that I played it, but never did finish it. It's a roguelike with some additional light RPG elements (i.e., you actually level up certain stats to make the game easier once if you die). My issue is that the runs are a bit too long. I kept dying on the end boss because I didn't understand its attack patterns well. Well, those deaths took me an hour to come back from, minimum. I get that's a staple of the roguelike genre, but it lost me. I had a blast in the first 10 to 20 runs as I saw constant improvement, but that flattens. It was a good game to play to wind down for the night after a dinner out (Sept. and Oct. of 2020 - the brief time we could go out!) but won't stick with me for the long term.

m12:

Score: 5

Hades and the Tedious Sisyphean Game Loop

I have little experience with rogue-like games. My last foray into the genre was Diablo III. I gave Hades 10 hours of play prior to quitting without finishing a runthrough. Why did I quit?

In fairness, Hades' game loop is refreshingly tight: resurrect after death, banter a few dialogue lines with various mythological characters at home, buy small character upgrades, venture out on a dungeon crawl through the same levels, collect single-run powerups to aid your attempt, die, and...do it all again. The combat feels punchy, and the multifarious mixture of weapons and single-run powers (boons) makes for a few hours of interesting combat. After that, it begins to feel like a smear of generic, furious button-mashing.

For me, the game loop was a double-edged sword. While tight, it became boring after a dozen escape attempts. The dialogue interludes are overwhelmingly facile permutations of "You shouldn't try to leave the Underworld, Zagreus!", or "You'll make it out eventually, boyo!" That, along with the glacially slowly unfolding story, and the mostly minor per-run character upgrades, just wasn't enough to motivate me to keep playing. I narrowly died to the final boss in run 16 and could only stomach a few more attempts before the allure of other games overwhelmed my motivation to slog through another Greek Groundhog Day escape attempt.

There were likely interesting story beats, upgrades, or new mechanics that I missed by quitting. But 10 hours was enough for me to cut losses and move on. ("I could be playing Divinity: Original Sin 2 or Fallout 4 again!") Overall my Hades experience was a mostly middling one. I can't recommend this game to others. Its charm turns to tedium too quickly.

m13:

Score: 5

The core gameplay is fun, and the game looks and sounds good. But the combat can be a visual mess, the story and characters lack any emotional depth, and you need to be prepared to play the game through 20+ times to reach the ending. And the ending itself is a big ol' slap in the face anticlimax.

m14:

Score: 7

Hades is a rogue-like, so you should be aware of what these are before playing. They aren't everyone's cup of tea and even for me I don't like most of them as they are simply too repetitive and lack reward. Hades stumbles in and out of this trap but I still enjoyed it quite a bit.

The graphics of Hades are close to what I would call cell-shaded. The PS5 really helps keep graphics fluid and a pleasure as everything operates smoothly at around 60FPS. The downside of Hades is the repetition, something I'll be talking about throughout this review. You'll be seeing the same 3/4 areas a lot and despite some variations in how levels are laid out, they still fall under the same themes of fire/dungeon etc.

The gameplay of Hades revolves around the rogue-like mechanics - you start at your base and go as far as you can, powering up along the way; if you die, you start over. Hades does well as it allows you to level up some abilities permanently, but for me this wasn't quite enough as you still lose most of your gains when you die, a key tenet of rogue-likes. The downside of this is that it's demotivating, especially as you have to traverse every area back to where you were, so it's quite frustrating if you're at the final boss, for example.

Hades is quite aware that you're going to be facing repetition. By this I mean that up until I finished playing there were still fresh dialogues appearing and after completing one run there were a lot of endgame options to make future runs more challenging. These are excellent features if you really enjoy rogue-likes and want to get mileage out of Hades.

The gameplay itself is pretty tight and flawless. You can unlock a variety of weapons to battle against repetition and I found combat quite engaging to the point I wanted to play more, but also annoying when I had to start from the very first area each time.

Hades has a God mode, which I wish I had switched on as soon as I started the game as it increases your defence after each death, helping to prevent tedium and repetition.

Hades has quite an in-depth story and a ton of lore to read. This didn't interest me but the banter and sarcasm between the characters was very enjoyable and the premise of the game is pretty easy to grasp. You won't be caught in endless unskippable cut-scenes!

Overall, whether you like Hades or not likely comes down to whether you like rogue-likes or not. If you do, I think you'll enjoy Hades a lot. I'm not overly fussed but still had a good time with Hades, however after one complete run I had had enough as the repetition really set in by this point. The game needs more permanent rewards and upgrades for me, which is why I'd probably recommend Children of Morta over Hades.

m15:

Score: 4

I read a lot of good reviews so i thought i'd take a shot but i wouldn't recommend it for fun.

It's too addictive and it pushes it on you aggressively.

It's repetitive and you get to a point where the fun is replaced with being annoyed.

It's an extreme grind fest and the buffs don't seem to do anything as a certain point.

It will give you RSI this thing is a massive button mash i don't think i've ever felt like my hands were this sore in a long, long time.

It's very hard to master the difficulty of this thing is very hard I didn't play demon souls because it was rumored to be terribly hard but this didn't have the same notoriety it should be warned that if you want variety you won't find it here.

The story is not so rewarding I don't know what I'm supposed to do in this game. Escaping the underworld isn't as rewarding as you would think.

It's like demon souls which I really didn't understand either and didn't attempt.

Maybe if I was younger I'd love it more.



# E

## Codes sorted under Themes

### E.1 Intertwining of Story and Gameplay

# Theme: Intertwining of Story and Gameplay

This document contains all codes sorted under the theme Intertwining of Story and Gameplay and its subthemes. Please note that sometimes surrounding sentences have been included for context.

## Intertwining of Story and Gameplay

You progress and continue uncovering lore even if you keep dying. And that is great motivation to keep going and makes the game much less frustrating).

Hades is incredibly fun and immersive!

In fairness, Hades' game loop is refreshingly tight: resurrect after death, banter a few dialogue lines with various mythological characters at home, buy small character upgrades, venture out on a dungeon crawl through the same levels, collect single-run powerups to aid your attempt, die, and...do it all again.

The story and characters are beautifully written. The tale unfolds slowly with each attempt you make, characters acknowledge your past deeds and each conversation with them is meaningful. The story is faithful to Greek mythology and remains original and unpredictable at the same time. They even bothered to explain the roguelike elements like the ever changing levels and your ability to die over and over again in the story and I love it when devs do that.

In so few cases does narrative shine through in a roguelike/roguelite, but Supergiant have absolutely nailed it with Hades, each death (and you will die, a lot) allows you to bring forward resources to increase your survivability, having the cast of characters about the house of Hades comment on your last run and how you met your grizzly end makes the world feel lived in and quickly gives insight to who these people are, pair that with frenetic fast paced combat, game changing divine boons that synergise in all kinds of weird and wonderful ways, a charming cast of characters brought to life by a stellar voice cast and you're on to another Supergiant classic.

In the first few runs, it might be hard to spot any significant progress, or it might seem very difficult to even enjoy it. But the gorgeous visuals, the great voice acting, the satisfying and tight gameplay and the glimpses into the lore will entice you to keep up playing.

The game somehow does both story and good repeatable gameplay at the same time.

Unusually for the sub genre there's plot and dialogue to spare, the large cast of classical characters delivering chunks of mythologically accurate exposition between (and often during) runs via an astonishing amount of nearly always entertaining dialogue. It's a

welcome amuse bouche before the main courses of mayhem to come, and helps establish Hades not just as a superior roguelike, but also a superb game in its own right.

Where other games hand out story as a reward for success, Hades uses it to reward failure. With each death Zagreus is sent back to the House of Hades where his father judges souls and legends gather. Doing a circuit of the court to see what new things they have to say (and give Cerberus a pat), lets you wind down and take a breath after your latest death has left your hands shaking. When I die in Dead Cells I want to quit, but in Hades the sting's immediately removed because I get to chat with an embodiment of night and see what's up with Orpheus.

You even get variants of some of the bosses to keep things interesting, and again, this often feeds back into the evolving story.

I was told to go back and do it again, with the game offering a small dialogue with Persephone each time I did so. This felt like a slap in the face to my expectations – that's it? No more biomes?

When it's done it's back to Dad's house to mope into the bedroom, spend a few upgrade points, chat to the relatives and then head out once more. Hell is a loop. Of course it is. But each circuit fills out the characters and deepens the connections until I have started to warm to Zagreus, for all his poise and chill.

What sets Hades apart isn't just that it's a great roguelike with the kind of repeatable depth that makes it engrossing to play for hours, but also how it uses its structure to tell an ongoing story about family, secrets, and resolution.

That Hades' narrative is so entwined with its combat is nothing new for the developers at Supergiant Games, who've established themselves as masters of putting your actions in sync with the stories they tell. In a roguelike such as Hades, it means playing as Zagreus, a god of rebirth. Tired of living under his father Hades' thumb and seeking answers about where he comes from, he sets out to escape to the world of the living,

These interactions, as much as the precise combat, are the reason I kept coming back to Hades; while I was skeptical about how the roguelike structure would meld with Supergiant Games' focus on characters and stories, they've written and voiced reams of dialogue and lore, and almost all of it is delivered with vigor and is intriguing enough to pore over between your treks through hell.

And even as you're contemplating whether you want your spear to deal bonus critical damage or imbue your dash with a deflecting shield, tantalizing narrative threads seep through. Most buffs, called boons, are tied to individual gods; if you want that deflect, you're going to have to ask Athena for it, while Artemis is in charge of critical damage. These short exchanges give each god a distinct personality and reflect your actions and progress; you also occasionally catch clues about a potential side quest or plot thread that ties into the larger narrative. I liked Athena, Artemis, and Dionysus not just because their boons were consistently useful, but because I took to Athena's austere will, Artemis' prickly reclusiveness, and Dionysus' laid-back flirtiness.



These conversations are more than narrative icing; you can give the gods gifts and build your relationships with them, too. Occasionally, you'll run into rooms where you can score two boons, but only after choosing one god and facing the wrath of the one you scorned as you fight off another round of enemies. Or, if you happen to end up with both that deflective dash and some critical damage, like I did, Athena and Artemis might have a quick chat with each other, then offer you a Duo boon that grants bonus critical damage to projectiles you deflect.

As you progress through hell, you'll start seeing those boons used against you, which itself says something; for as much as the gods pay lip service to want to meet them on Olympus when offering boons, your journey to escape torment is little more than a spectacle to them, a game to watch and manipulate from the sidelines.

Does that thread lead anywhere? It's hard to say because Hades unfurls so many other threads like this that tie its characters, your actions, and the world together into one cohesive, powerful whole that takes time to unravel. Eventually, you meet characters that sprinkle interesting bonuses into your runs while simultaneously launching new side stories back in the House of Hades, and even bosses change over the course of multiple runs. Supergiant has managed to turn the roguelike, a genre not usually known for riveting plots, into a compelling vehicle for storytelling.

The random nature of the genre does mean the kind of climactic moments that define traditional stories are hard to come by, but I loved that. Rather than face an imposing boss, learning about a new twist of fate, and then moving on to the next act, you have hundreds of conversations with your family, roommates, and enemies about whatever comes to mind. This is where Hades' bid to tell its story differently pays off, as playing it eventually feels like living in a crowded home for months, one where arcs happen, but nothing truly "ends." It's the kind of story that makes small moments more significant. After being chided by Hades with a dismissive "Back again?" having failed to kill a boss, then listening to everyone around simply wring their hands about the lord of the dead, I understood why Zagreus would want to leave the shadow of his overbearing, distant father. That convergence between player and character motivation is a powerful feeling, and it's what Supergiant delivers so brilliantly.

In the 1.0 version of the game, after you defeat Hades, Zagreus leaves the confines of hell and finds Persephone. After a brief bit of long-overdue mother-son bonding, Zagreus becomes weak and dies. It turns out he can't survive topside for long. The game then turns into a series of jaunts to the surface (assuming you're able to defeat Hades each time) wherein Zagreus frantically scrambles to learn bits and pieces about why his mom left, what Hades stood to gain by hiding it from him, and how to get his mom to return to the underworld. I read most of these conversations as a doomed effort. Persephone had regrets, sure, but she liked the life and home she'd built for herself and did not seem to be in a hurry to get reacquainted with the lord of the dead

While some players, myself included, have reached Hades' final scene, they still haven't puzzled out exactly what number of runs or other preconditions trigger it. But as with everything else in the game, it seems to be inevitable. You just have to keep making runs

and talking to characters, who react to the sudden return of their queen. You just have to stick with it.

In the ancient Greek myth of Sisyphus, a poor soul is doomed to forever push a boulder uphill without rest. Each time he'd push it up, it would roll back down again and he'd have to start anew. But what if that Herculean climb uphill was actually awesome combat against a randomized variety of enemies as you fight your way out of Hell, with a wide range of godly powers that grow and combine in interesting ways as you progress? And what if, instead of going back to zero, you got a little stronger each time with some help from a colorful cast of allies and enemies who remember each of your attempts?

The journey of Zagreus, son of Hades, through the labyrinthine Underworld toward the freedom of the mortal realm unfolds from an isometric perspective as you take on hordes of colorfully animated undead that fill the screen with danger in every randomly ordered room you pass through.

Not only are conversations and side stories actively engaging -- attempting to reunite Achilles with his life-long partner, Patroclus, or Orpheus with his long-lost muse Euridice, are genuinely moving and hearken back to the kind of melodrama the ancient Greeks were so good at -- there are also gameplay benefits!

Something that's truly special and unusual about Hades is that Supergiant Games uses these persistent relationships to travel the difficult path of marrying story to gameplay, and in doing so elevates the simple loop of Zag's escape into something more than the sum of its parts. Within the world of most rogue-lites, a failed run is not typically seen as part of the story (with apologies to Rogue Legacy). But in Hades, a death leads to Zag returning home to mockery (usually from Papa Hades). This transforms something as fundamental as death from a video game-y failure state into in-game world building. Characters remember your triumphs and failures with a staggering amount of incidental dialogue that made me feel like I was constantly chipping away at new content within Zagreus' story even when I failed.

It makes sense within the fiction as well, considering the bosses remember their past failures and successes against you. Each fight is like a rematch between rivals rather than a repeat.

When you finally decide to take another stab at escaping, runs are broken up into a few different worlds, each made up of several randomly ordered chambers. Hades' combat builds on Bastion's tight, isometric fights and infuses them with the endlessly repeatable appeal of random buffs, modifiers, random enemy layouts, currencies, and progression that slowly turn the seemingly impossible task of reaching the surface into something manageable.

Occasionally, you'll run into rooms where you can score two boons, but only after choosing one god and facing the wrath of the one you scorned as you fight off another round of enemies. Or, if you happen to end up with both that deflective dash and some critical damage, like I did, Athena and Artemis might have a quick chat with each other, then offer

you a Duo boon that grants bonus critical damage to projectiles you deflect. As you progress through hell, you'll start seeing those boons used against you, which itself says something;

It's the kind of story that makes small moments more significant. After being chided by Hades with a dismissive "Back again?" having failed to kill a boss, then listening to everyone around simply wring their hands about the lord of the dead,

Rather than face an imposing boss, learning about a new twist of fate, and then moving on to the next act, you have hundreds of conversations with your family, roommates, and enemies about whatever comes to mind.

it is a game whose structure and story are both rooted in repeated, inescapable failure

you try to slash, shield bash, spear, bow, punch, and gun your way out of hell, but no matter how many demonic shades fall after (ode to a Grecian) earning your ire, you end up back where you started.

Supergiant describes Hades as a roguelike, but only because there's not really a good genre descriptor that sums up what it really is. In between action-based runs through the ever-shifting halls of Tartarus, Asphodel, Elysium, and the Temple of Styx, you spend ample time talking to various gods, goddesses, shades (ghosts, basically), and Dusa, who defies categorization.

Given the number of possible permutations of your progress both through the game and with various characters, it is a mind-bogglingly complex narrative system that somehow manages to feel coherent at almost all times.

I've heard a few of them express frustration about particular bosses or their struggles in certain areas. I always tell them: "Give it a few more runs. You'll get past that part, and then, a few more runs after that, you'll be amazed that you ever had trouble in the first place."

Hades presents the illusion of difficulty and a brutal learning curve, but it ensures that, no matter what, everybody will eventually get over the finish line. Its ever-changing labyrinth is a hall of mirrors, but not in a maliciously deceptive way.

items that can be used to permanently boost your stats, making you better able to withstand whatever challenges you face.

Fights also do a subtly sublime job of preparing you for future fights; enemies and bosses call forward to each other.

Even if you're having trouble making bone-heads or bone-tails of its attack patterns, you'll eventually gain enough HP and death defiances (think "lives" in classic games) that you'll have ample room for error. If that's not enough, you can also toggle on "God Mode," which gives a slight, steadily increasing boost to your damage resistance after each failed run.

Each Hades run is full of randomized powerups and "boons" from various gods and goddesses that imbue Zagreus with additional powerful abilities but only last until you die.

No matter how you play, you experience the tension of staring down imposing bosses, the thrill of accidentally assembling your dream build. You die a whole, whole lot, but you do it at your own pace.

It takes a long, long, long time for Zagreus' relationships with his closest blood relatives to improve, but in the meantime, he creates meaningful bonds with his found family and makes his homeland a more livable place.

While some players, myself included, have reached Hades' final scene, they still haven't puzzled out exactly what number of runs or other preconditions trigger it. But as with everything else in the game, it seems to be inevitable. You just have to keep making runs and talking to characters, who react to the sudden return of their queen. You just have to stick with it.

This first attempt ended at the first boss, Megaera. In later runs she is practically a pushover, but my inexperience and difficulty in reading her movements cost me in the end. Not exactly the ending I had in mind, but that was almost at the end of the first region. Considering my prior experience with rogue-likes in *Binding of Isaac*, my expectations were set a bit too high for what future content may be in store for me.

Upon death, I was revived back in the underworld in a hub of sorts. It was here that I learned what the use of all of the other trinkets were: darkness to unlock permanent upgrades like restoring health between rooms and revivals, keys to unlock more upgrade options and new weapon choices, nectar to trade for passive keepsakes, and treasure to give slight bonuses during the runs such as money-filled urns.

The keepsakes from nectar were a one-time thing from each NPC, so I realistically only needed a couple of them. The best nectar rewards I found were from the hub area (Cerberus and Skelly), so I really didn't need any more nectar, though I did try a good number of them in hopes of getting something else worthwhile.

Any nectar given beyond the keepsake was purely for narrative purposes, something I found little to no interest in going forward. The majority of the treasure trades involved mere cosmetics to the hub, hardly worth the effort in acquiring. Therefore, I found that the most valuable resources were darkness and keys, as they were the key to the more consistent permanent upgrades. After taking another couple runs seeing what was beyond Megaera, I decided to spend a few runs dedicated to solely getting more darkness and keys. The most valuable upgrade was Death Defiance, a revival ability giving a lot of wiggle room for mistakes going forward. Once I had a few abilities maxed out and every weapon unlocked, it was time to see what more Hades had in store for me.

With newfound power in hand, I effortlessly made my way past the second region, Asphodel. The boss there, the Bone Hydra, was an absolute joke with my newly obtained spear. Elysium, on the other hand, felt fairly ordinary. Tartarus was an interesting, yet standard opening region, and Asphodel introduced dangerous lava everywhere creating a thematic difference. Going to Elysium felt too similar to Tartarus, but that's a minor complaint in the grand scheme of things.

A solemn ending sequence led me to Zagreus' mother, Persephone, only for him to promptly die and get revived back in the underworld once again. There was no danger there, just a story beat that, no matter what, death is inevitable after reaching that point. I was told to go back and do it again, with the game offering a small dialogue with Persephone each time I did so. This felt like a slap in the face to my expectations – that's it? No more biomes? At this point, the gameplay had gotten a bit stale to me.

The only new gameplay content I could work towards were the weapon aspects, which are slight alterations to how a weapon functions. For my preferred weapon of choice, the spear, these aspects included a change to the spin attack that I never used and an alteration to the spear toss, something I only ever used when I got specific upgrades for it in a run. To me, these upgrades felt worthless, and on top of that, they had a high cost in a rare upgrade material: titan blood.

Titan blood is only obtained as drops from a couple of the bosses, and those drops don't reset on a new run unless the difficulty, known as heat, is cranked up. Thus a loop is created of slowly playing through the game repeatedly for meager gameplay rewards. There's no longer any motivation for me to keep playing. There's nothing to play for.

Hades wants to motivate through continued bits of dialogue with seemingly no end in sight. Each death introduces new things for every NPC to say. Each nectar given unlocks a small little blurb about that character, which involves even more RNG to both get the nectar and find the character, assuming said character isn't one of the ones in the underworld hub. The burn is agonizingly slow, such that I never got a real sense of story progression with any of the characters at any meaningful pace. The end result is a high effort with low reward, in nearly all aspects of the game.

It lives to clobber. Room after room of hell. You turn up and wait for horrors. The horrors arrive and, jeepers, you shred them. You pulverize them. I have never felt so sorry for the stuff of nightmares.

This might be one of my favourite things about Hades. Over many runs you get stronger and last longer and get different weapons to try out.

When it's done it's back to Dad's house to mope into the bedroom, spend a few upgrade points, chat to the relatives and then head out once more.

The journey of Zagreus, son of Hades, through the labyrinthine Underworld toward the freedom of the mortal realm unfolds from an isometric perspective as you take on hordes of colorfully animated undead that fill the screen with danger in every randomly ordered room you pass through.

Almost inevitably, though, the forces of Hades will overwhelm you eventually, and every death sends Zag back home to start over from scratch, save for persistent currencies and progress in relationships with the wonderful cast of characters who inhabit the Underworld, from lord Hades himself all the way down. So you're going to be spending a lot of time getting to know everyone -- and it's time very well spent.

Sisyphus as a tragic character, he's an optimist who you encounter on a break while the gods aren't watching.

Not only are conversations and side stories actively engaging -- attempting to reunite Achilles with his life-long partner, Patroclus, or Orpheus with his long-lost muse Euridice, are genuinely moving and hearken back to the kind of melodrama the ancient Greeks were so good at -- there are also gameplay benefits!

Like me, after a couple of successful escapes you may find yourself thinking, "How can I make subsequent attempts harder?" Enter the Pacts of Punishment, a challenge board that allows you to activate a number of modifiers to make Hades even more challenging. Toggling one on adds allows you to earn new rewards, making every playthrough fresh and exciting.

With each death Zagreus is sent back to the House of Hades where his father judges souls and legends gather. Doing a circuit of the court to see what new things they have to say (and give Cerberus a pat), lets you wind down and take a breath after your latest death has left your hands shaking. When I die in Dead Cells I want to quit, but in Hades the sting's immediately removed because I get to chat with an embodiment of night and see what's up with Orpheus. Then, back in the zone, I buy another round of upgrades and try again.

At the start of each run you pick a legendary weapon, like the Aegis shield, accept a boon, like the one from Dionysus that adds hangover damage (read "poison") to your attacks, and enter the first of the underworld's three realms.

They're made up of randomized chambers where a set number of enemies spawn, you vanquish them, collect a reward, and enter the next chamber.

Gold coins, obols from the eyes of the dead, can be spent at Charon's shop when it pops up in a chamber for temporary buffs and heals, while shards of darkness can be spent in the House of Hades for permanent upgrades, like backstab damage or the ability to defy death and come back at half-health when you'd otherwise fall. Gems buy renovations for the hub but also for the underworld, adding rooms with healing pools or urns that can be smashed for obols.

And my frequent attempts to escape his grasp make up one of the best games I've played all year.

I obliterate the minions of Hades through random room after random room filled with the cloudy, lost souls hoping to send me back to where I started. I'm awarded a different upgrade after every battle. My strength grows, giving me the power I need to climb even higher as I try to reach the surface. But as always happens in games like Hades, I make a misstep, I lose all my health, and I die. I fall into a pool of blood and go back to where I started.

But when I wake up back at home, Hades reveals its true nature. It's a game where each attempt to get to the end is a run where I battle through the world, collect some resources, and start over with new, permanent upgrades.

I enter my room to spend some currency I found on my last run — upgrading myself and increasing my chances at success — and move into the armory. I collect a trinket — gifts from my loved ones — talk to Skelly, my sentient practice dummy, and select a weapon from Hades' arsenal.

When I first land in the courtyard of Tartarus, the game randomly offers me one of two things: a Boon or a Daedalus Hammer.

Healing doesn't come easy in Hades, and I take every piece of food, healing fountain, or health bonus I can find. But my failure takes time. At first, I'm sent back to the House of Hades when my health hits zero, but as I go, I gain the ability to revive myself multiple times each run.

But even when I beat that boss and finish my journey, it's not over. The game tempts me with new materials to upgrade my weapons further and customize my home. But no matter how many runs I win or how many times I've fallen, I'm always jumping out that window again, just trying to see what that first upgrade will be, and then the next, and then the next.

Whether it's the game's smooth combat, deep loot systems, or engrossing story, I'm always motivated to boot it up and go for another run. like a shamed teenager, ready to start again.

In most games of this nature, where each attempt strips you of progress and hard-won powers, being sent back to the start makes me want to quit. But when Zagreus re-emerges into the chambers of Hades, there are gossiping shades and surly servants; the lord of the underworld grumbles over stacks of paperwork, barely glancing upwards to reprimand his son for his latest escape attempt. I am quickly distracted from my failure by some words of sympathy from Nyx, or Megaera mooching in the corner. And before long I am back at it,

This story is all wrapped around Hades' compelling action gameplay. You dodge, use a basic attack, a charge attack, a special attack, and a magic attack. The dodge is a constant, the weapon attacks are all based on which of the six weapons you've got equipped, and the magic attack is dictated by whichever god you've decided to cosy up to.

You see, outside of the permanent upgrades you can unlock, the vast majority of your power-ups come in the form of boons offered to you by the gods of Olympus. While each of the gods offers basic improvements to your stats, they also specialise in some kind of status effect or alteration. Zeus, for example, is all about lightning. Ares, the one true god of war, gets two effects, one called Doom which does heavy damage a short while after you've hit something, and the other called a Blade Rift, which basically summons spinning swords in set places.

You get special rewards for using each of these weapons and beating the bosses as you make your way up to the surface, and each of those rewards unlocks some other kind of

permanent progression. It's all just very clever, and you can even build your relationship with each of the characters you meet to learn more about both them and yourself.

Hades applies the formula expertly to an equally polished isometric action RPG brawler, creating sadistic assault courses from strings of standalone rooms populated by an amusing menagerie of netherworldly creations, dastardly traps and melodramatic deities drawn from Greek mythology.

I get killed.

Return back to the beginning, only to get to know the characters.

Then the addiction of trying to escape again kicks in....

And it gets late....

Just going to try one more time.

I also need items!

But I hate lava. :S

...

Seems like a lot of media tried framing this game as having "fixed" the roguelike genre, but I think it actually pulls out some of the worst bits of it. Especially being someone who prefers roguelikes \*without\* persistent upgrades. As I'd rather have the emphasis on skill development, over grinding. Give me a sandbox to master, not a hamster wheel to run. Hades unfortunately is similar to something like Rogue Legacy, where it begins to feel grindy and padded after a point. Unlike Isaac - a game that does unlocks and mandatory multiple playthroughs pretty well - where there's a ridiculous amount of new stuff to find after every run .

...but Hades' well runs dry after a point. At least, gameplay-wise.

The game somehow does both story and good repeatable gameplay at the same time. Every run through the game's 4 levels is different due to the many varied power-ups, both permanent and temporary, that you as the player have to choose from. That, coupled with several different weapons and the fantastic array of characters you meet along the way, makes this game a solid 10/10. And I didn't even mention the outstanding soundtrack.

-The combat alone is amazing and the game is a must-play just for that. It's fast, varied, tactical, flashy, intuitive and super fun...

-The roguelike elements serve their purpose incredibly well. A perfect blend of permanent progression and randomized items and upgrades lost on death means that each run is unique and engaging, but you can also feel yourself progressing and becoming stronger. What all of this means is that the game warrants being played again and again and again which is great, considering how fun it is.

The first few hours dedicated to beat the final boss are perfect. Good learning curve, new weapons unlocking, learning each biome, and the game is gorgeous. And then I beat the boss.

And after that the game sadly turns into the most boring grindfest I've ever seen in a decent roguelite. Same levels, same bosses, no surprises, no alternate paths, no secrets. Just do it



over and over again for a couple of bloods and diamonds in order to upgrade a couple of things, and then do it again.

I'll recommend the game for the first part (up to killing the end boss) because the game is incredible and rewarding then, but after that I'll say this is a very poor roguelite with regard to replayability. The content just gets old very fast. The only new stuff is dialogue lines, and while they may lead to a few new gadgets, we're still talking about a few more dozens of runs just to see it through, replaying the exact same content.

The game has several resources that you will collect during gameplay runs. Those resources are then spent between runs, either for upgrades, cosmetics, or advancing the story/lore. This meta progression is a "hook": it drives new players to gather as many of those resources as possible, to unlock all of the content. The game essentially drip-feeds content to keep the player invested, run after run.

Often, you'll want to pursue a quest with a particular character, who will be conveniently absent until a few more runs, as an attempt to pad the game's length. Often, collecting those resources will be more important than picking options that are good for your current run.

This game is amazing! A fantastical history with a incredible gameplay. All of the players need to play this rogue like.

Perfect gameplay loop keeps you wanting to try one more run. Story that continues to expand in a meaningful way; doesn't feel padded.

Great game. It is nailing the gameplay loop to make it fun and addictive. After every run you go to the hub and even if you did not succeed, you will have some new dialogues, events, you will upgrade the character, unlock new weapon... something new will happen almost every time. And once you unlock the upgrades, you just want to start again to see how it affects next run. So you keep doing this loop (unlock new stuff, test new stuff) until next morning :-D

I had fun with this for the 15-20 hours that I played it, but never did finish it. It's a roguelike with some additional light RPG elements (i.e., you actually level up certain stats to make the game easier once if you die). My issue is that the runs are a bit too long. I kept dying on the end boss because I didn't understand its attack patterns well. Well, those deaths took me an hour to come back from, minimum. I get that's a staple of the roguelike genre, but it lost me. I had a blast in the first 10 to 20 runs as I saw constant improvement, but that flattens. It was a good game to play to wind down for the night after a dinner out (Sept. and Oct. of 2020 - the brief time we could go out!) but won't stick with me for the long term.

### Hades and the Tedious Sisyphean Game Loop

I have little experience with rogue-like games. My last foray into the genre was Diablo III. I gave Hades 10 hours of play prior to quitting without finishing a runthrough. Why did I quit?

In fairness, Hades' game loop is refreshingly tight: resurrect after death, banter a few dialogue lines with various mythological characters at home, buy small character upgrades, venture out on a dungeon crawl through the same levels, collect single-run powerups to aid your attempt, die, and...do it all again. The combat feels punchy, and the multifarious mixture

of weapons and single-run powers (boons) makes for a few hours of interesting combat. After that, it begins to feel like a smear of generic, furious button-mashing.

For me, the game loop was a double-edged sword. While tight, it became boring after a dozen escape attempts. The dialogue interludes are overwhelmingly facile permutations of "You shouldn't try to leave the Underworld, Zagreus!", or "You'll make it out eventually, boyo!" That, along with the glacially slowly unfolding story, and the mostly minor per-run character upgrades, just wasn't enough to motivate me to keep playing. I narrowly died to the final boss in run 16 and could only stomach a few more attempts before the allure of other games overwhelmed my motivation to slog through another Greek Groundhog Day escape attempt.

The core gameplay is fun, and the game looks and sounds good. But the combat can be a visual mess, the story and characters lack any emotional depth, and you need to be prepared to play the game through 20+ times to reach the ending. And the ending itself is a big ol' slap in the face anticlimax.

The gameplay of Hades revolves around the rogue-like mechanics - you start at your base and go as far as you can, powering up along the way; if you die, you start over. Hades does well as it allows you to level up some abilities permanently, but for me this wasn't quite enough as you still lose most of your gains when you die, a key tenet of rogue-likes. The downside of this is that it's demotivating, especially as you have to traverse every area back to where you were, so it's quite frustrating if you're at the final boss, for example.

[Well balanced, Mechanics, Gameplay] The gameplay itself is pretty tight and flawless. You can unlock a variety of weapons to battle against repetition and I found combat quite engaging to the point I wanted to play more, but also annoying when I had to start from the very first area each time.

Hades has a God mode, which I wish I had switched on as soon as I started the game as it increases your defence after each death, helping to prevent tedium and repetition.

## Labour of Love

Tartarus was an interesting, yet standard opening region, and Asphodel introduced dangerous lava everywhere creating a thematic difference.

I love what Hades is made of.

All of which is to say: Hades is a proper lark. I love it.

This game comes from Hell, and it takes you back there, and it's brilliant. Get in.

I understood why Zagreus would want to leave the shadow of his overbearing, distant father. That convergence between player and character motivation is a powerful feeling, and it's what Supergiant delivers so brilliantly.

I'm also thinking about how much I still have left to learn about Hades, both the character and the game, even dozens of hours in.

Hades is my game of the year. It's also the game of the year. I don't mean to say that Hades is objectively the best, because that's an impossible metric (and also Baldur's Gate 3 isn't out yet). Rather, developer Supergiant's Greek mythology-flavored action roguelike is, improbably, the game that best characterizes the year 2020.

Also Cerberus, who is both bigger than all other dogs and [has three heads](#), thus making him quantifiably the best boy

The system Zagreus found himself trapped in was hopeless, but the situation was not. Life was not. It was an extremely powerful statement delivered through a combination of mechanics, narrative, and an incomplete game.

I watched people much smarter than me talk about how hopelessness is useless, [good causes are gaining ground in smaller ways](#), and no matter where you live, there are vitally important grassroots organizations that anybody can contribute to—people need only seek them out. I knew this logically, but that didn't reassure me much. Hades helped me feel it.

Hades isn't just a game about failure. It's also about family, sacrifice, the lies people tell themselves, and a whole host of other subjects. It takes source material that is often quite dark and a central narrative that is very grim and comes out with something that is remarkably lighthearted. It's a heck of a balancing act, but Hades pulls it off. Supergiant has managed, against all odds, to craft a Greek mythological tale that gives most characters a happy ending.

A multifaceted story that unfolds based on how you play, sublime combat that rewards experimentation, challenges that are only as difficult as you want them to be, all the good feelings of roguelikes without a lot of the hassle.

One person [replied by saying](#) that “the actual best story of Hades is the one that the player has with their experience of the game.” It would, in the case of so many other games, be a banal observation, but in this case, it rings unusually true. Hades unfurls itself in what could be an infinite number of different configurations based on how you play—or, if we take early access into account, even when you played.

Hades is a near-flawless romp through hell after two years of early access  
An aged, fine wine that would make Dionysus himself proud

And my frequent attempts to escape his grasp make up one of the best games I've played all year.

Hades has been a comfort game for me since it [launched into early access in 2018](#), and it's especially been an excellent source of comfort over the past few days — something we're all in short supply of in 2020.

I started my first journey through the Underworld in Hades two years ago. The game functioned basically the same as it does now. It was an excellent, fully functional game — albeit with only two bosses.

Hades has always been so good that it's hard to put down, and now it's feature complete with the 1.0 launch on both Nintendo Switch and PC. It's the same game I loved in 2018, but more of it.

Try as I might, I cannot find fault in Hades. It's even created a calm in me that no other similar game has. Loss isn't a frustrating experience met with loud swear words and the sounds of scrambling feet made by my previously sleeping cats. Failure is just another step on a long adventure with one of my favorite games, years in the making and well-worth the wait.

Powered by chugging guitars, frenetic fighting and luscious, flamboyant depictions of figures from Greek mythology, this excellent action game from the arthouse studio Supergiant has been many years in the making.

Claiming these blessings also offers up opportunities to have conversations with the gods, which is just as interesting. The bickering, shifting alliances and long, long histories of affairs and grievances between the Greek deities and their entourage shines through in Hades' writing.

Since launching into Early Access two years ago, Hades has grown from being an excellent roguelite with a surprisingly touching story and beautiful art and sound design into being, well, still an excellent roguelite, but now with even more content and a surprisingly heartbreaking story. It's the kind of constant improvement that shows off just how good Early Access can be when done right, and the end result is that Hades might just be one of the most exceptional roguelites around.

It's also impossible to really discuss without spoiling things, but suffice to say that it's been a joy to see how each update has expanded the story and the satisfying ending that you can now work toward earning. This requires multiple successful runs through the game, but you'll know when you've seen the last of it when you get there, I promise.

Hades is one of the best roguelites of all-time. It's a phenomenal achievement in story telling, gameplay, and an absolute treat for both your eyes and ears. It's astounding, and it's always been fairly astounding through Early Access, but this final release cements it as one of the greats. If you like roguelites, and even if you don't, you should probably get in on this as soon as you can.

Supergiant's crisp, colourful and chaotic journey through the underworld is a superior roguelike and a tremendous game in its own right

Hades applies the formula expertly to an equally polished isometric action RPG brawler, creating sadistic assault courses from strings of standalone rooms populated by an amusing menagerie of netherworldly creations, dastardly traps and melodramatic deities drawn from Greek mythology.

Combat is crisp, chaotic and perfectly pitched on just the right side of frustrating.

the large cast of classical characters delivering chunks of mythologically accurate exposition between (and often during) runs via an astonishing amount of nearly always entertaining dialogue. It's a welcome amuse bouche before the main courses of mayhem to come, and helps establish Hades not just as a superior roguelike, but also a superb game in its own right.

This game is amazing! A fantastical history with a incredible gameplay. All of the players need to play this rogue like.

In so few cases does narrative shine through in a roguelike/roguelite, but Supergiant have absolutely nailed it with Hades, each death (and you will die, a lot) allows you to bring forward resources to increase your survivability, having the cast of characters about the house of Hades comment on your last run and how you met your grizzly end makes the world feel lived in and quickly gives insight to who these people are, pair that with frenetic fast paced combat, game changing divine boons that synergise in all kinds of weird and wonderful ways, a charming cast of characters brought to life by a stellar voice cast and you're on to another Supergiant classic.

Best of the Genre since The Binding of Isaac.

Perfect gameplay loop keeps you wanting to try one more run.

Perfect balance of challenge and meaningful ability unlocks and upgrades.

A "revolution" in the roguelite genre, thanks to an always progressing character driven narrative that deepens as you loop (die) over and over.

Probably Supergiant's best, and most accessible, game to-date.

What a masterpiece! From the voice acting, to the level design, music, progression and story... I don't have enough words to praise this game as it deserves.

All in all a pretty unique and masterful turn on a not-so-much-loved genre. Well done Supergiant Games. And not for the 1st time ...

Great game. It is nailing the gameplay loop to make it fun and addictive.

Fantastic game. Played it on Xbox One X and it is fast, beautiful and seriously addictive. I have finished Dead Cells, Hollow Knight, The Ascent, Children of Morta, etc, and it is by far the best one..

In fairness, Hades' game loop is refreshingly tight:

I remember after playing Bastion a long time ago, I wanted an endless mode because I liked it so much. Hades plays pretty much like that, which is nice. The characters are likable, the voice acting and aesthetic are on point - all the usual SuperGiant stuff.

In summation: Hades works as an action game, and is good for one completion. But doesn't really have the factor that makes most roguelikes click, for me.

Every run through the game's 4 levels is different due to the many varied power-ups, both permanent and temporary, that you as the player have to choose from. That, coupled with several different weapons and the fantastic array of characters you meet along the way, makes this game a solid 10/10. And I didn't even mention the outstanding soundtrack.

Just to add my positive review to the pile: Hades has been one of the most addictive games I've played in a while, in the best sense of the word.

Hades has all the stuff that makes Supergiant's games awesome, but it's fourteen times bigger and with almost infinite replayability. Very recommended.

Hades is and always will be one of my favorite games ever.

And of course, the story and characters alone are completely worth buying this game. The music, voice acting, the graphics, everything is perfect. I have literally no complaints about Hades, except that's a little bit /too/ good, lol.

If you're wondering if all of the praise that this game has received from gamers and critics alike is warranted - yes, yes it is. There aren't enough good things to say about this game but I'm gonna try. TL:DR easily on the best games ever, get it and play it! This is one of those rare games where not a single thing is at merely an acceptable level. Everything is absolutely awesome.

I love everything about it. It's a Dungeon Crawler. It's a roguelike. It's an action RPG. And it excels at all of those and then some. Don't hesitate and buy this game ASAP, you are doing yourself a disservice by not playing it!

The first few hours dedicated to beat the final boss are perfect. Good learning curve, new weapons unlocking, learning each biome, and the game is gorgeous. And then I beat the boss. And after that the game sadly turns into the most boring grindfest I've ever seen in a decent roguelite.

I'll recommend the game for the first part (up to killing the end boss) because the game is incredible and rewarding then, but after that I'll say this is a very poor roguelite with regard to replayability.

Supergiant has once again created a game with masterful narrative, visuals, music, voices, story, gameplay, but they have not handled the roguelite aspect very well.

So: a very good and short action game, or a very limited and repetitive roguelite.

The game has some really strong points,

And it's made of everything the developer Supergiant has learned from making dashing, finely poised action games like Bastion and Transistor - and storied, wilful, luminous oddities like Pyre.

What's surprising about Hades, to me at least, is how gutsy it is, how vitally in love with connection it is.

But there is something else here, something that I have always felt about games but never been able to put into words. There is something about polished, smartly conceived Hades, about so many of Supergiant's games which, the joyous brilliance of Pyre aside perhaps, are always too rigorous, too responsibly conceived not to know exactly what spot they're going to fit into on the shelf, which pillars they're going to present to the press - there is something about these games that are so assuredly products that reminds me that games are never ever just products. Games are always a way of being.

Hades is a one-of-a-kind rogue-lite that sets the bar for creatively combining wildly different genres together and using their strengths to complement each other in unexpected ways. Its blend of satisfying, twitch-based action with countless modifiers to build replayability, dating simulator-esque character interactions, and turning failure into a thing you look forward to as a means of progressing the story coalesce to an experience that is more than the sum of its parts.

Truly a labor of love! Hades is the result of Supergiant Games taking the high bar they set for themselves with previous releases (Bastion, Transistor, Pyre) and raising it even higher. Any roguelike fans, action fans, greek mythology fans, or anyone who just appreciates a rock solid game with beauty art and sound design MUST check out Hades.

Phenomenal

For me it's the production values and the narrative. The outstanding artwork, the great and original story, the well written characters, the numberless references to greek mythology, the eye-winking irony, the speaker cast. And: the soundtrack! Everything is done with so much love for detail, originality and feel for great mature entertainment. The motivation to start over with the 40 th run here is not simply to master a challenge but to find out what waits beyond the temple of Styx and how the story develops.

Overall, Hades is a superb quality game from Supergiant, well worth the price and sets a benchmark for future games.

## E.2 Story



# Theme: Story

This document contains all codes sorted under the theme Story and its subthemes. Please note that sometimes surrounding sentences have been included for context.

## Forming Relationships

Quite apart from its fine qualities as a hellish hack-and-slasher, Hades has what Twitter would describe as strong bisexual energy.

One thing that this game does that they've not done before is to make sure that nearly everyone you meet is as hot as Hell. That's not a necessity in a game, but it's always nice when it's there. There's also some serious chemistry between Zagreus and Thanatos, but I've yet to reach the end of that little plotline...

So what's the difference? For me it's the production values and the narrative. The outstanding artwork, the great and original story, the well written characters, the numberless references to greek mythology, the eye-winking irony, the speaker cast. And: the soundtrack! Everything is done with so much love for detail, originality and feel for great mature entertainment. The motivation to start over with the 40 th run here is not simply to master a challenge but to find out what waits beyond the temple of Styx and how the story develops.

A fantastical history

Story that continues to expand in a meaningful way; doesn't feel padded.

Yet I want to know the story and the characters. To 100% it.

Whether it's the game's smooth combat, deep loot systems, or engrossing story, I'm always motivated to boot it up and go for another run.

Lovely art! All the characters looks dynamic and have good designs that fits them. Like how some random colour dots of green and purple makes everything so vibrant.

The areas looks cool, and stylish. Fits the games gener and its story.

It's also impossible to really discuss without spoiling things, but suffice to say that it's been a joy to see how each update has expanded the story and the satisfying ending that you can now work toward earning.

I rolled credits on Hades at approximately 48 hours and I'm still met with new storylines, challenges, and side stories to tackle -- and a peak at the achievement list teases an epilogue I've yet to discover how to unlock.

Hades tells the story of Zagreus, son of the titular god of the underworld. It tells this story through small conversations you come across in the down periods between bouts of intense isometric action. The story is perhaps the most remarkable thing about Hades because I've

played a lot of roguelites and I've never come across one that tells a story quite as well as this one does.

I'd gotten so caught up in the story

Every time you succumb to the legions of Hell, the disappointment is tempered by the prospect of returning to Hades' chambers again for a chat with Achilles and to give Cerberus a snuggle. This game has found the secret to (almost) eternal storytelling: a play loop that repeats itself, but dialogue that doesn't. Interesting things happen all the time, in conversations and chance encounters as well as in battles, and no matter how long I spend with Hades I feel like I am only just getting acquainted with it.

But Hades maintains the narrative focus and charm found in Supergiant's other titles — Bastion, [Transistor](#), and [Pyre](#).

Sure, I want every run to end in victory, but I also want to buy that music stand for the throne room, unlock all the keepsakes, and see how this romantic subplot plays out. Like Orpheus I look back, only unlike him I'm happy to keep repeating this cycle.

Characters, in turn, react to your progress and deeds, some of which come to directly involve them. Given the number of possible permutations of your progress both through the game and with various characters, it is a mind-bogglingly complex narrative system that somehow manages to feel coherent at almost all times.

Even if you're having trouble making bone-heads or bone-tails of its attack patterns, you'll eventually gain enough HP and death defiances (think "lives" in classic games) that you'll have ample room for error. If that's not enough, you can also toggle on "God Mode," which gives a slight, steadily increasing boost to your damage resistance after each failed run. It makes narrative sense—you're a friggin' god, after all—and it doesn't lock you out of anything.

Pinched between the cruel fingers of The Fates, Hades' story becomes a tale about reframing failure. When what you really want remains just outside your grasp, what can you do? A whole lot, it turns out.

Zagreus begins his journey trying to get the hell out of Hades. He seeks to escape, heedless of what that might mean for those he leaves behind. There's a sort of nihilism underpinning this: Sure, he has a very personal reason for departing, but he also sees the place itself as emblematic of his father's failure. It's beyond redemption, so why stay? Over time, though, his focus shifts. There is no big revelation, no on-the-nose "aha" moment that heralds this change in his personal trajectory. He just sort of starts helping other characters and rebuilding a place that's fallen to pieces after eons of structural neglect, and even as his own situation reveals itself to be more and more dire, he ramps up his efforts.

But this also forced the spotlight onto the tangible outcomes of Zagreus' actions. Despite his deaths, the lives of those around him improved. The house of Hades did, too. I chose to make those improvements because I didn't have much else to do with the resources I was amassing. But it felt good. It felt like an extension of who Zagreus had become while stuck in

the blades of this nightmarish blender. The system Zagreus found himself trapped in was hopeless, but the situation was not. Life was not. It was an extremely powerful statement delivered through a combination of mechanics, narrative, and an incomplete game.

Something that's truly special and unusual about Hades is that Supergiant Games uses these persistent relationships to travel the difficult path of marrying story to gameplay, and in doing so elevates the simple loop of Zag's escape into something more than the sum of its parts. Within the world of most rogue-lites, a failed run is not typically seen as part of the story (with apologies to Rogue Legacy). But in Hades, a death leads to Zag returning home to mockery (usually from Papa Hades). This transforms something as fundamental as death from a video game-y failure state into in-game world building. Characters remember your triumphs and failures with a staggering amount of incidental dialogue that made me feel like I was constantly chipping away at new content within Zagreus' story even when I failed.

Hades skillfully navigates the millenia-old baggage of ancient characters, reinterpreted through a contemporary lens that feels like they're straight out of some animated series that's way ahead of its time.

Since launching into Early Access two years ago, Hades has grown from being an excellent roguelite with a surprisingly touching story and beautiful art and sound design into being, well, still an excellent roguelite, but now with even more content and a surprisingly heartbreaking story.

And of course, the story and characters alone are completely worth buying this game.

### Storytelling

the story is well told that even the game credits will keep you watching.

This is where Hades' bid to tell its story differently pays off, as playing it eventually feels like living in a crowded home for months, one where arcs happen, but nothing truly "ends."

It's a phenomenal achievement in story telling

I'm sure there's a point where, after running through hell enough times, I'll have seen all Hades has to offer, both in its clever and endless fights and its many alluring characters, intimate moments, and rewarding quests. The story does end. But what matters so much more are all the moments between the start and end of a story, and the people who help us see those climactic moments but also stick with us between them. They're the reason we keep trying, and the reason we keep coming back.

This is not all to say that Hades tries to wriggle out of saying anything definitive. It says plenty no matter how you slice it. But a good story is in the telling, and Hades tells its story a little differently to everybody. It's like a good myth, in that regard. Or a hydra, in that it has a lot of heads, but nobody can quite agree on exactly how many.

That rich seam of conglomerated content also extends to the game's surprisingly engaging over-arching narrative. Each run starts in the House of Hades, a gloriously gauche mansion populated by the big and the bad of the Underworld, and who carry on like the cast of a reality show. I'm a Demigod, Get Me out of Here, perhaps.

banter and sarcasm between the characters was very enjoyable and the premise of the game is pretty easy to grasp.

plus the characters are all interesting and given life with decent voice-acting.

So what's the difference? For me it's the production values and the narrative. The outstanding artwork, the great and original story, the well written characters, the numberless references to greek mythology, the eye-winking irony, the speaker cast. And: the soundtrack! Everything is done with so much love for detail, originality and feel for great mature entertainment. The motivation to start over with the 40 th run here is not simply to master a challenge but to find out what waits beyond the temple of Styx and how the story develops.

a charming cast of characters

Boons (power ups) come by way of the many Olympic deities you call family, and that personal touch will likely result in you playing favorites... which can come with it's own surprises.

That, coupled with several different weapons and the fantastic array of characters you meet along the way, makes this game a solid 10/10.

The characters are likable,

And of course, the story and characters alone are completely worth buying this game.

I get killed.

Return back to the beginning, only to get to know the characters.

Then the addiction of trying to escape again kicks in....

And it gets late....

Just going to try one more time.

I also need items!

We play as Zagreus, wayward son of the underworld, trying to escape his father's gloomy domain and see the world above. As an immortal, he cannot die – but each time he is defeated by the denizens of the underworld, whether by the fallen warriors of Elysium or the flaming skulls and witches in Tartarus, he is returned to his bedroom like a shamed teenager, ready to start again.

Claiming these blessings also offers up opportunities to have conversations with the gods, which is just as interesting. The bickering, shifting alliances and long, long histories of affairs and grievances between the Greek deities and their entourage shines through in Hades' writing. Zagreus says "mate" far too often for any wayward immortal – indeed, he says it about as often as a London market trader – but the relationships and characters here are nonetheless believable and intriguing.

But when Zagreus re-emerges into the chambers of Hades, there are gossiping shades and surly servants; the lord of the underworld grumbles over stacks of paperwork, barely

glancing upwards to reprimand his son for his latest escape attempt. I am quickly distracted from my failure by some words of sympathy from Nyx, or Megaera mooching in the corner. And before long I am back at it, trying to escape from fiery Asphodel, running into a zombie Charon mumbling over some treasures for sale or descending into a pit to meet Chaos.

These are upgrades passed to me by my uncles and cousins in Olympus. Zagreus has never met Ares, Poseidon, Zeus, Hera, or any of the others, but they all feel sympathy for him. He's a nice enough kid, and eager to meet his family, and they all know that his dad is the ultimate asshole in Greek myth.

That's half of what keeps me coming back to Hades, and the other half is the unfolding story of Zagreus. He could easily have been the worst flavor of videogame protagonist, an angry buff princeling smoldering with generic rage. Instead it's his father Hades, a goth beefcake Santa who spends all day shouting at paperwork and moaning about his underlings, who fills that role. Zagreus is likeable, with a wry sense of humor, and when Hades sarcastically asks how the latest attempt at trashing the realm goes he replies, "My ransacking was a delight, thanks for asking." The prince also just seems like a decent person, listening to shades when they talk about how they died, appreciating the house servant who is also a severed gorgon head, and taking note of who the employee of the day is while saying, hey, good for you, Achilles.

I stop by Hypnos, who turns to me and offers me his condolences on my failure — remarking on whatever beast managed to take me down. And then I approach the desk of my father, Hades. I'm not just some wayward soul trying to escape the underworld, after all, I'm prince of the underworld: Zagreus.

In Hades, you are that defiant son. And your asshole dad? That would be Hades, brother to Zeus and Poseidon, lord of the Underworld.

Hades has the gruff temperament of Kratos from God of War, acting as if I'll never do anything good enough for him. The more I talk to him, the more I think there's some kind of affection beneath his mean exterior, but it's rare that you ever hear it in his voice. As we chat, Zagreus himself has the smug air of a young adult committed to his goth attitude and aesthetic. Every comment from Zagreus to his father is sarcastic or accusatory. He's spent eons dealing with Hades, just as Hades has spent eons dealing with Zagreus.

There's a shared history between these two characters, a mix of mistrust, love, exhaustion and frustration. Hades lives in that place of self-superiority, certain that his son will never understand the lengths he's gone through to be a father and lord of the Underworld. He doesn't seem to have the time or patience to deal with his son's rebellion any longer. In response, Zagreus exudes a real "fuck you, old man" attitude, but he's too cool to ever say it out loud, preferring a sarcastic nod and a biting comment to direct, verbal confrontation. Father and son always part ways with a dismissive laugh or frustrated sigh.

Supergiant chose Zagreus as a protagonist because he is a bit of a pencil shadow in the mythological texts - hazy shape and no real substance, a whisper of graphite. The writing team styles him as the kind of irresistibly arch Ivy League hardnut that Donna Tartt writes about so well, bruised cheekbones and dewy forehead, lip a dissolute twist just waiting to

attain its precarious hold on a Gauloise. He is charismatic and chancy, refined without being remotely delicate. But then the game's action comes along and turns him into the part of every episode of *The Property Brothers* where teardown kicks in - mallet meets plasterboard and the sky is busy with splintered timber. The kitchen becomes a crater in seconds. The violence is backed by the unflinching heft of metal. What a complicated fellow.

The gods who deliver this stuff are wonderfully charming and untrustworthy and vain and drunken

I'd gotten so caught up in the story of my character, Zagreus, and the heroes, villains, and gods that had helped him get here that I was elated to have finally gotten him to the end of his journey.

That long-tail approach to worldbuilding may not work for everyone; before I played *Hades*, I didn't see myself as someone who'd continue to play a roguelike after beating it. But I wanted to keep learning more about these characters and this underworld enough to keep coming back.

You get to know these characters as 10 hours give way to 20, 30, 60, and onward. When I first encountered Achilles while playing *Hades*' early access version over the summer, I thought he was a dreary shadow perpetually posed against the same dull wall. Now, months later, he's like a father, brother, and maybe more to me—a font of generosity in spite of his own past failures.

Characters, in turn, react to your progress and deeds, some of which come to directly involve them. Given the number of possible permutations of your progress both through the game and with various characters, it is a mind-bogglingly complex narrative system that somehow manages to feel coherent at almost all times.

Zag is a rebellious heartthrob trying to find his place in the world between Hades and Mount Olympus. His sympathetic coming-of-age story brought me in, but I fell in love with his tongue-in-cheek musings on the world around him and snarky back-and-forth with the disembodied voice of the Narrator.

But the heart and soul of *Hades*, outside of its combat, lies in Zag's interaction with various deities and mythic figures from Greek myth, like Achilles, Orpheus, and more. It turns out that adding a dash of dating simulator mechanics to a rogue-lite was the secret sauce in making good use of a large cast of interesting characters.

Each personality feels like an authentic reinterpretation of a classic Greek myth, and they're all a joy to behold. For instance, instead of painting Sisyphus as a tragic character, he's an optimist who you encounter on a break while the gods aren't watching. Even his boulder (affectionately known as Bouldy) sports a carved smile that reacts in silence upon interaction. Investing in Zag's relationships with each character paves the way for interesting backstory reveals, world-building, new sidequests, or even items to assist on your future escape attempts.

Hades skillfully navigates the millenia-old baggage of ancient characters, reinterpreted through a contemporary lens that feels like they're straight out of some animated series that's way ahead of its time.

can pet doggo A+

You can pet cerberus. 10/10

good game can pet cerberus

When you die, you return home and pet the dog.

you can pet the big dog

You can pet best boy cerberus

You can pet cerberus !!!

Each time I come back from a run through the Underworld, I'm able to have a new conversation with different characters inside Hades' house. Occasionally, I find Nectar out in the Underworld, which I can give to my friends as gifts, improving my relationship with my mentor Achilles, my step-mother Nyx, and a whole cast of characters — netting me new dialogue and trinkets to help with my escape plan.

I collect a trinket — gifts from my loved ones — talk to Skelly, my sentient practice dummy, and select a weapon from Hades' arsenal.

You get special rewards for using each of these weapons and beating the bosses as you make your way up to the surface, and each of those rewards unlocks some other kind of permanent progression. It's all just very clever, and you can even build your relationship with each of the characters you meet to learn more about both them and yourself.

The keepsakes from nectar were a one-time thing from each NPC, so I realistically only needed a couple of them. The best nectar rewards I found were from the hub area (Cerberus and Skelly), so I really didn't need any more nectar, though I did try a good number of them in hopes of getting something else worthwhile. Any nectar given beyond the keepsake was purely for narrative purposes, something I found little to no interest in going forward.

In between action-based runs through the ever-shifting halls of Tartarus, Asphodel, Elysium, and the Temple of Styx, you spend ample time talking to various gods, goddesses, shades (ghosts, basically), and Dusa, who defies categorization. Also Cerberus, who is both bigger than all other dogs and [has three heads](#), thus making him quantifiably the best boy. You can give these characters gifts to strengthen your bonds, but just conversing with them over the course of countless runs is enough to peel back many of their layers.

You get to know these characters as 10 hours give way to 20, 30, 60, and onward. When I first encountered Achilles while playing Hades' early access version over the summer, I thought he was a dreary shadow perpetually posed against the same dull wall. Now, months

later, he's like a father, brother, and maybe more to me—a font of generosity in spite of his own past failures.

You clean up the lounge in the house of Hades so that you can exchange gems, won during runs, and other currencies for additional items and currencies that help improve subsequent runs. You give gifts to characters in exchange for “keepsakes” that yield special bonus stats and abilities for as long as they're equipped.

Other improvements follow, but they take on a decidedly less selfish, more personal bent. You help Orpheus, the dour but good-natured musician, rediscover his muse. You reconnect Achilles with his lost love. You get Megaera and her, uh, very different sisters back on speaking terms. You make a bunch of cosmetic improvements to the lounge that don't do jack for your escape attempts, but they make the life of Dusa the Gorgon, functionally an overworked housekeeper, easier.

It takes a long, long, long time for Zagreus' relationships with his closest blood relatives to improve, but in the meantime, he creates meaningful bonds with his found family and makes his homeland a more livable place. Not only that, he reveals himself to be the kind of guy who'll just listen to random shades talk about how they died, helpfully bring fish to the lounge's chef, and even just quietly celebrate whoever most recently took home the title of lounge employee of the [incalculable amount of time because the future is also the present in Hell, sort of, it's hard to explain]. Zagreus never stops being a spoiled prince, but he comes to regard everyone around him, regardless of status, as people with their own wants, needs, and existences.

Other characters, in turn, go from being quietly insulted that he's leaving to openly pleased that he's staying and finally pitching in. By the time it becomes abundantly clear that Zagreus will never be able to leave Hades, you get the sense that he's made his peace with it. He's figured out what he can do, and though it's not as grandiose as his original plan, it might be more important.

Almost inevitably, though, the forces of Hades will overwhelm you eventually, and every death sends Zag back home to start over from scratch, save for persistent currencies and progress in relationships with the wonderful cast of characters who inhabit the Underworld

And of course, during each run you also build your relationships with the Gods of Olympus by offering them tokens of appreciation in the form of nectar and ambrosia that you collect, which also grant you access to their own collection of keepsakes and up the chances of receiving rare, epic, and heroic variants of their boons with progressively better stats.

## Immersive

These interactions, as much as the precise combat, are the reason I kept coming back to Hades; while I was skeptical about how the roguelike structure would meld with Supergiant Games' focus on characters and stories, they've written and voiced reams of dialogue and lore, and almost all of it is delivered with vigor and is intriguing enough to pore over between your treks through hell.



I fell in love with his tongue-in-cheek musings on the world around him and snarky back-and-forth with the disembodied voice of the Narrator.

Story, art, music, voice-acting, atmosphere? A+.

Not so in Hades, where every character is fully voiced and has more to say with every run.

Hades has the gruff temperament of Kratos from God of War, acting as if I'll never do anything good enough for him. The more I talk to him, the more I think there's some kind of affection beneath his mean exterior, but it's rare that you ever hear it in his voice. As we chat, Zagreus himself has the smug air of a young adult committed to his goth attitude and aesthetic. Every comment from Zagreus to his father is sarcastic or accusatory. He's spent eons dealing with Hades, just as Hades has spent eons dealing with Zagreus.

It tells this story through small conversations you come across in the down periods between bouts of intense isometric action.

a charming cast of characters brought to life by a stellar voice cast and you're on to another Supergiant classic.

Excellent controls, voice acting and music. Perfect balance of challenge and meaningful ability unlocks and upgrades.

What a masterpiece! From the voice acting, to the level design, music, progression and story...

The outstanding artwork, the great and original story, the well written characters, the numberless references to greek mythology, the eye-winking irony, the speaker cast. And: the soundtrack! Everything is done with so much love for detail, originality and feel for great mature entertainment.

Hades is incredibly fun and immersive! Never a dull moment, the action is fast-paced yet the game play is surprisingly well balanced, not frustratingly difficult but gives enough challenge to motivate the player to move forward. The graphics are colorful and well-drawn, plus the characters are all interesting and given life with decent voice-acting.

Chatchy music, it gets stuck in your head. But not mindblowing. Good voice acting, each character has a perfect voice for their sprite. Either soft-spoken, boastful etc. Still have some feeling of softness in it. Or maybe there are no voice actors and the characters actually the ones who speak! ( Plottwist )

Hades plays pretty much like that, which is nice. The characters are likable, the voice acting and aesthetic are on point - all the usual SuperGiant stuff.

In the first few runs, it might be hard to spot any significant progress, or it might seem very difficult to even enjoy it. But the gorgeous visuals, the great voice acting, the satisfying and tight gameplay and the glimpses into the lore will entice you to keep up playing.

Then, the huge number of upgrades, weapons, synergies, dialogues, challenges, modifiers, etc... will make you stay and enjoy it like a kid. Once you get into it, you have to play A LOT before it feels repetitive. The fact that each dialogue is voice acted and that I've rarely heard the same line twice in +60h still amazes me.

The music, voice acting, the graphisme, everything is perfect.

Not to mention that all of this is leveraged by the absolutely stellar voice acting.

-The music and sound design are incredible. Each hit is accentuated perfectly and every environment is enriched greatly by the ambiance. The soundtrack is godly, nothing less, I will never get enough of it, no matter how many times I hear it.

the story is well told that even the game credits will keep you watching.

This is where Hades' bid to tell its story differently pays off, as playing it eventually feels like living in a crowded home for months, one where arcs happen, but nothing truly "ends."

It's a phenomenal achievement in story telling

I'm sure there's a point where, after running through hell enough times, I'll have seen all Hades has to offer, both in its clever and endless fights and its many alluring characters, intimate moments, and rewarding quests. The story does end. But what matters so much more are all the moments between the start and end of a story, and the people who help us see those climactic moments but also stick with us between them. They're the reason we keep trying, and the reason we keep coming back.

This is not all to say that Hades tries to wriggle out of saying anything definitive. It says plenty no matter how you slice it. But a good story is in the telling, and Hades tells its story a little differently to everybody. It's like a good myth, in that regard. Or a hydra, in that it has a lot of heads, but nobody can quite agree on exactly how many.

That rich seam of conglomerated content also extends to the game's surprisingly engaging over-arching narrative. Each run starts in the House of Hades, a gloriously gauche mansion populated by the big and the bad of the Underworld, and who carry on like the cast of a reality show. I'm a Demigod, Get Me out of Here, perhaps.

A "revolution" in the roguelite genre, thanks to an always progressing character driven narrative that deepens as you loop (die) over and over.

After every run you go to the hub and even if you did not succeed, you will have some new dialogues, events,

What a masterpiece! From the voice acting, to the level design, music, progression and story...

A solemn ending sequence led me to Zagreus' mother, Persephone, only for him to promptly die and get revived back in the underworld once again. There was no danger there, just a story beat that, no matter what, death is inevitable after reaching that point. I was told to go back and do it again, with the game offering a small dialogue with Persephone each time I did so. This felt like a slap in the face to my expectations – that's it? No more biomes?

Your godliness justifies the endless runs through the depths of the underworld, since dying and coming back to life is par for the course in Greek myth. One of the best parts of Hades, in fact, is returning to the House of Hades time and again after you die. It's not just a pit stop on the way to the next run--it's the centerpiece Hades hinges on. There, figures such as Achilles, Hypnos, and Nyx console you after your deaths, praise you for making progress, and confide in you about one another. You chat with them, undertake side quests, and exchange gifts to deepen your relationships. Eventually, they become vital allies on your quest, even if they're not in the thick of combat with you.

And even as you're contemplating whether you want your spear to deal bonus critical damage or imbue your dash with a deflecting shield, tantalizing narrative threads seep through. Most buffs, called boons, are tied to individual gods; if you want that deflect, you're going to have to ask Athena for it, while Artemis is in charge of critical damage. These short exchanges give each god a distinct personality and reflect your actions and progress; you also occasionally catch clues about a potential side quest or plot thread that ties into the larger narrative. I liked Athena, Artemis, and Dionysus not just because their boons were consistently useful, but because I took to Athena's austere will, Artemis' prickly reclusiveness, and Dionysus' laid-back flirtiness.

That long-tail approach to worldbuilding may not work for everyone; before I played Hades, I didn't see myself as someone who'd continue to play a roguelike after beating it. But I wanted to keep learning more about these characters and this underworld enough to keep coming back.

Like in the Greek myths Hades takes inspiration from, endings aren't tidy, and they're almost never final. They're protracted, often unsatisfying, and are hard to find real closure in, and the fact that Hades understands this is its greatest strength.

everything, anyway), Hades is a game that respects the heck out of players' time. Each run yields some form of tangible progress, both in terms of character dialogue and items that can be used to permanently boost your stats, making you better able to withstand whatever challenges you face.

the satisfying and tight gameplay and the glimpses into the lore will entice you to keep up playing

I've rarely heard the same line twice in +60h still amazes me.

Hades wants to motivate through continued bits of dialogue with seemingly no end in sight. Each death introduces new things for every NPC to say. Each nectar given unlocks a small little blurb about that character,

the gods your character Prince Zagreus randomly encounters on each run and which completely transform his attempt to ascend from Hades to Mount Olympus

Characters, in turn, react to your progress and deeds, some of which come to directly involve them.. Given the number of possible permutations of your progress both through the game and with various characters, it is a mind-bogglingly complex narrative system that somehow manages to feel coherent at almost all times.

## Relatable and Familiar

the story is well told that even the game credits will keep you watching.

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But that's Greek mythology for you: fate can be cruel, and the gods don't really care what happens as long as they are entertained.

Any roguelike fans, action fans, greek mythology fans, or anyone who just appreciates a rock solid game with beauty art and sound design MUST check out Hades.

the numberless references to greek mythology

I bought it a year ago on Switch because as a greek myths fan, I was curious.

The story and characters are beautifully written. The tale unfolds slowly with each attempt you make, characters acknowledge your past deeds and each conversation with them is meaningful. The story is faithful to Greek mythology and remains original and unpredictable at the same time. They even bothered to explain the roguelike elements like the ever changing levels and your ability to die over and over again in the story and I love it when devs do that.

The best Greek myths are about gods and heroes, and when ordinary mortals are involved they boil down to fairytale morals about how you should obey your weird husband no matter what because he might turn out to be the West Wind. Hades knows this, and focuses on legendary characters like Athena and Achilles, painting them in broad archetypal strokes. My favorite's Dionysus, god of wine, hedonism, and everybody just being like really cool, but everyone from long-suffering fury Megaera to layabout Sisyphus is brought to life,

It's made of mythology, of course - Zeus and Nyx and all that other spontaneous, terrifying, pitiable lot who have been lurking in their own form of Early Access for millenia.

Hades applies the formula expertly to an equally polished isometric action RPG brawler, creating sadistic assault courses from strings of standalone rooms populated by an amusing menagerie of netherworldly creations, dastardly traps and melodramatic deities drawn from Greek mythology.

battling various undead monsters, living creatures, and mythological figures on his way out.

Your godliness justifies the endless runs through the depths of the underworld, since dying and coming back to life is par for the course in Greek myth. One of the best parts of Hades, in fact, is returning to the House of Hades time and again after you die. It's not just a pit stop on the way to the next run--it's the centerpiece Hades hinges on. There, figures such as Achilles, Hypnos, and Nyx console you after your deaths, praise you for making progress, and confide in you about one another. You chat with them, undertake side quests, and exchange gifts to deepen your relationships. Eventually, they become vital allies on your quest, even if they're not in the thick of combat with you.

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Rather, developer Supergiant's Greek mythology-flavored action roguelike is, improbably, the game that best characterizes the year 2020.

Zeus adds lightning to abilities, because that is his main thing (aside from very bad horny decisions).

In Hades, one of Greek myth's most famous characters, the boulder-pushing Sisyphus, has a bit part. When he's not eternally rolling a rock up a hill, he doles out items in the game's first area, Tartarus. Despite his arduous, backbreaking lot in un-life, he comes across as blissfully cheerful—a ray of sunshine in the dank depths of Hades' deepest chambers. Some

players have observed that this is similar to a rumination on the character by philosopher and author Albert Camus, who in 1942 famously wrote that “one must imagine Sisyphus happy,” basically saying that if Sisyphus accepted the futility of his struggle—or at least, its lack of an inherent meaning or goal—he could find contentedness within it.

In a Reddit AMA last week, Hades writer and designer Greg Kasavin said that this was not a deliberate nod, but added that it’s “pretty cool” that he and Camus arrived at similar conclusions. To me, this particular riff on Sisyphus naturally arises not just from the reality of his situation, but also, in Hades’ case, Zagreus’ story. Sisyphus serves as a sort of reflection, a microcosm of Zagreus’ own Sisyphean struggle and the contentedness he can find in accepting that, for the time being, he may not be able to break free from the hell that confines and defines his whole world, but he can still at the very least make small but meaningful improvements to the lives of those around him.

## **E.3    Gameplay**

# Theme: Gameplay

This document contains all codes sorted under the theme Gameplay and its subthemes. Please note that sometimes surrounding sentences have been included for context.

## Addictiveness

Einstein famously defined insanity as doing the same thing again and again but expecting a different result each time. Quite would he made of 'roguelikes', then, is anybody's guess.

However once you fall under Hades' spell after a couple of runs the near limitless combinations of character builds becomes bewitching.

In most games of this nature, where each attempt strips you of progress and hard-won powers, being sent back to the start makes me want to quit. But when Zagreus re-emerges into the chambers of Hades, there are gossiping shades and surly servants; [...] I am quickly distracted from my failure by some words of sympathy from Nyx, or Megaera mooching in the corner. And before long I am back at it,

I know I won't stop returning to the underworld until Zagreus sees the surface. Just as each run holds the promise of that perfect boon, that lucky run of enemies perfectly suited to the weapon I've chosen, something can always happen to screw things up.

And my frequent attempts to escape his grasp make up one of the best games I've played all year.

The more I talk to him, the more I think there's some kind of affection beneath his mean exterior, but it's rare that you ever hear it in his voice.

I jump back into Tartarus from my second story window and start climbing again.

The game tempts me with new materials to upgrade my weapons further and customize my home. But no matter how many runs I win or how many times I've fallen, I'm always jumping out that window again, just trying to see what that first upgrade will be, and then the next, and then the next.

Every time I tried out a new Hades patch, I would get lost in an endless cycle of runs for a week, and all my gaming time would disappear. Hades has always been so good that it's hard to put down,

Whether it's the game's smooth combat, deep loot systems, or engrossing story, I'm always motivated to boot it up and go for another run.

I'm now over 50 hours in, 70 escape attempts deep and I can't stop thinking about my next trip to Hell. Hades is an experience I never want to end.



You get to know these characters as 10 hours give way to 20, 30, 60, and onward.

While sticking with Hades for what I thought was going to be an additional day but turned out to be an additional week of late-night "just one more run" sessions,

What sets Hades apart isn't just that it's a great roguelike with the kind of repeatable depth that makes it engrossing to play for hours,

These interactions, as much as the precise combat, are the reason I kept coming back to Hades;

This is where Hades' bid to tell its story differently pays off, as playing it eventually feels like living in a crowded home for months, one where arcs happen, but nothing truly "ends."

But I wanted to keep learning more about these characters and this underworld enough to keep coming back. That, along with a robust postgame that alters every weapon and boss, lets you make the game even harder for more rewards, and offers even more reasons to play an already entrancing mix of RPG and action combat, has absolutely hooked me.

I've put countless hours into this while in early access on PC, I'm so happy to have it on the switch so I can bring it on the go with me.

Perfect gameplay loop keeps you wanting to try one more run.

Ok, this one got me. I'm normally not the rogue-like-type. Too repetitive, too frustrating. Normally. Hades somehow managed to glue me to the screen for at least 30 hours, till i got my first run complete.

The motivation to start over with the 40 th run here is not simply to master a challenge but to find out what waits beyond the temple of Styx and how the story develops.

Great game. It is nailing the gameplay loop to make it fun and addictive.

And once you unlock the upgrades, you just want to start again to see how it affects next run. So you keep doing this loop (unlock new stuff, test new stuff) until next morning :-D

Update: After 50+ "deaths", finally reached the ending, the story is well told that even the game credits will keep you watching. And will keep playing the game to unlock more story lines and weapon aspects.

Played it on Xbox One X and it is fast, beautiful and seriously addictive.

I had a blast in the first 10 to 20 runs as I saw constant improvement, but that flattens.

It's to addictive and it pushes it on you aggressively.

I get killed. Return back to the beginning, only to get to know the characters. Then the addiction of trying to escape again kicks in....And it gets late....Just going to try one more time.I also need items!

Still have lingering addiction to this game. "I want to play Hades" Despite how frustrating and repetitive it can be. Stills gives a thrill of each try.

When I wrote this review, I was at 51 h .. Now at 113 h I still haven't completed all the side stories yet ... Hoping for the the dialouge to show up can feel like an eternity. Heh.

Hades has been one of the most addictive games I've played in a while, in the best sense of the word.

But the gorgeous visuals, the great voice acting, the satisfying and tight gameplay and the glimpses into the lore will entice you to keep up playing.

Then, the huge number of upgrades, weapons, synergies, dialogues, challenges, modifiers, etc... will make you stay and enjoy it like a kid.

Once you get into it, you have to play A LOT before it feels repetitive. The fact that each dialogue is voice acted and that I've rarely heard the same line twice in +60h still amazes me.

I bought it a year ago on Switch because as a greek myths fan, I was curious. I've never regretted it, and I don't regret buying it again on Steam so I can now also play it on my computer.

A perfect blend of permanent progression and randomized items and upgrades lost on death means that each run is unique and engaging, but you can also feel yourself progressing and becoming stronger. What all of this means is that the game warrants being played again and again and again which is great, considering how fun it is.

Just as each run holds the promise of that perfect boon, that lucky run of enemies perfectly suited to the weapon I've chosen,

I obliterate the minions of Hades through random room after random room filled with the cloudy, lost souls hoping to send me back to where I started.

The Daedalus Hammer increases the number of times my shield bounces between enemies. This may not sound exciting at first, but combined with powerful Boons, it could be the key to my escape attempt.

Every run I combine new effects like these together. More often than not, I smile at how absurdly powerful my Zagreus has become.

Even if you're having trouble making bone-heads or bone-tails of its attack patterns, you'll eventually gain enough HP and death defiances (think "lives" in classic games) that you'll have ample room for error. If that's not enough, you can also toggle on "God Mode," which

gives a slight, steadily increasing boost to your damage resistance after each failed run. It makes narrative sense—you're a friggin' god, after all—and it doesn't lock you out of anything.

But even if you rough it, like I did, you'll likely become powerful and savvy enough that you'll eventually gain the presence of mind to start working your creative muscles. Each Hades run is full of randomized powerups and "boons" from various gods and goddesses that imbue Zagreus with additional powerful abilities but only last until you die.

No matter how you play, you experience the tension of staring down imposing bosses, the thrill of accidentally assembling your dream build.

I have yet to find many wrong choices here. There are definitely builds that will just melt bosses, but unlike in other roguelikes, I've never felt the need to seek out guides or optimal builds to give myself a real chance at success.

The first time I beat the final boss in [Hades](#), I felt an enormous sense of relief. I'd been fighting to see this ending for hours (months, technically, if you count my time in early access), and in roguelikes, it feels better than usual to see an ending. But while I was definitely a little too proud of putting together a set of abilities and perks that shredded the boss after they wrecked me just a few tries ago, that wasn't why I felt tears welling up.

What's surprising about Hades, to me at least, is how gutsy it is, how vitally in love with connection it is. It lives to clobber. Room after room of hell. You turn up and wait for horrors. The horrors arrive and, jeeppers, you shred them. You pulverise them. I have never felt so sorry for the stuff of nightmares.

but for one glorious ten minute spell in Hades I had a shield that bounced around between enemies for a hilariously long time and left electricity in its clattering wake. I could chuck my shield, do the school run and return in time to catch it in the middle of a room in which everyone but me had been fatally pummelled in my absence. Meanwhile my dash spawned dark little infernal whirlpools that dragged enemies in for extra damage.

To play Hades, Roguelite aside, economy aside, loop aside, is to be furious and vengeful, to be driven by bitterness, self-hate, ennui, to be pulverisingly powerful and yet horribly efficient.

Just as each run holds the promise of that perfect boon, that lucky run of enemies perfectly suited to the weapon I've chosen,

Like any good roguelike, Hades forces you to make difficult decisions that either complement your current build or throw caution to the wind and attempt a riskier build that could pay off four chambers down the line...if you survive long enough and luck into the boon you're hoping for.

No matter how you play, you experience the tension of staring down imposing bosses, the thrill of accidentally assembling your dream build.

That, and how buffs interact in myriad surprising and effective ways, means I'm still not tired of making these runs, dozens of hours later.

Or a chance to get a gift from the squabbling cast of ancients?

The gods who deliver this stuff are wonderfully charming and untrustworthy and vain and drunken - the underworld is a Bluth Company construct, right down to the McMansion you all live in - but what really clicks for me is the way that this procedural game allows you to procedurally clip together your own Zagreus each time, and each time it's bittersweet because you know things won't fall together in quite this way ever again.

Haven't Lego-bricked that one together again since.

## Agency

And even as you're contemplating whether you want your spear to deal bonus critical damage or imbue your dash with a deflecting shield,

Occasionally, you'll run into rooms where you can score two boons, but only after choosing one god and facing the wrath of the one you scorned as you fight off another round of enemies. Or, if you happen to end up with both that deflective dash and some critical damage, like I did, Athena and Artemis might have a quick chat with each other, then offer you a Duo boon that grants bonus critical damage to projectiles you deflect. As you progress through hell, you'll start seeing those boons used against you, which itself says something;

That, along with a robust postgame that alters every weapon and boss, lets you make the game even harder for more rewards, and offers even more reasons to play an already entrancing mix of RPG and action combat, has absolutely hooked me.

These relationships mean that Hades' goals are fundamentally different from those of other roguelikes, many of which prioritize difficulty and mastery above all else. Hades builds upon that foundation, but despite a focus on failure, the game isn't actually about the player beating their head against a series of brick walls until they finally break through.

Even if you're having trouble making bone-heads or bone-tails of its attack patterns, you'll eventually gain enough HP and death defiances (think "lives" in classic games) that you'll have ample room for error. If that's not enough, you can also toggle on "God Mode," which gives a slight, steadily increasing boost to your damage resistance after each failed run.

I have yet to find many wrong choices here. There are definitely builds that will just melt bosses, but unlike in other roguelikes, I've never felt the need to seek out guides or optimal builds to give myself a real chance at success.

"heat" (a set of conditions players can activate to make Hades harder, in exchange for better rewards)

No matter how you play, you experience the tension of staring down imposing bosses, the thrill of accidentally assembling your dream build. You die a whole, whole lot, but you do it at your own pace.

This dovetails nicely with the game's own mechanical kindness; like Thanatos, the god of death who expresses his affection by giving you health-increasing hearts, Hades acts all distant and difficult at first, but it really just wants you to have everything your heart desires. It wants to help you achieve your goals at a pace that suits you.

Upon death, I was revived back in the underworld in a hub of sorts. It was here that I learned what the use of all of the other trinkets were: darkness to unlock permanent upgrades like restoring health between rooms and revivals, keys to unlock more upgrade options and new weapon choices, nectar to trade for passive keepsakes, and treasure to give slight bonuses during the runs such as money-filled urns.

Want to get in the thick of it and wreck some demons? Then consider the straightforward Stygian Blade. Prefer to peck at foes from a safe distance? Then channel your inner Artemis and use the bow. Later you'll unlock a bashing shield, a spear, and more, and each plays significantly differently, creating one of many layers of replayability for Hades.

At the start of each run you pick a legendary weapon, like the Aegis shield, accept a boon, like the one from Dionysus that adds hangover damage (read "poison") to your attacks, and enter the first of the underworld's three realms.

I enter my room to spend some currency I found on my last run — upgrading myself and increasing my chances at success — and move into the armory. I collect a trinket — gifts from my loved ones — talk to Skelly, my sentient practice dummy, and select a weapon from Hades' arsenal.

As Zagreus, I have a deceptively simple combat arsenal. I have a basic attack, a special move, a dash, and a ranged attack called a Cast that fires a ranged barb that sticks into enemies for a brief time.

And I have these attacks for each of my six weapons — but I can select only one weapon prior to each run. I can upgrade and alter each of these moves every run, and they combine into something unique every time I play.

When I first land in the courtyard of Tartarus, the game randomly offers me one of two things: a Boon or a Daedalus Hammer.

The Daedalus Hammer is one of the most desirable upgrades in the game, dramatically altering how my weapon works. For example, the special ability on the shield is a Captain America-type throw that bounces between a few targets before returning to me. The Daedalus Hammer increases the number of times my shield bounces between enemies. This may not sound exciting at first, but combined with powerful Boons, it could be the key to my escape attempt.

The Daedalus Hammer is rare, and I'm lucky to have more than two on any given run. Boons are far more common. So these Boons imbue Zagreus with a fraction of the gods' powers, to help him on his journey

These Boons offer me minor effects that impact various aspects of combat, usually focused on my attack, special, or Cast. If I pick up the Daedalus upgrade that lets my shield bounce, maybe I would want to find a Zeus Boon that causes my special to spawn lightning bolts on every enemy hit by my special attack? Or a Boon from Dionysus that transforms my Cast into a hazy pool that stuns and poisons targets inside, keeping them still for my shield to bounce.

When I clear my first chamber, I'm presented with a choice of doors. Each has different symbols on the outside, previewing the upgrade I'll get for completing that room. Do I want a boon from Athena? Or I could just get some gold to shop with?

Charon, the boatman, has an underworld shop where I can buy health, Boons, and a variety of other items. No matter what I choose, I move forward. Eventually I reach the first boss, the Furies.

Just as each run holds the promise of that perfect boon, that lucky run of enemies perfectly suited to the weapon I've chosen, something can always happen to screw things up.

game changing divine boons that synergise in all kinds of weird and wonderful ways the way it makes random, repetitive content feel unique by constantly delivering meaningful variations.

There are also a variety of weapons and skills to suit the style of the player, variety of monsters, traps and rewards.

You can unlock a variety of weapons to battle against repetition and I found combat quite engaging to the point I wanted to play more

You'll be seeing the same 3/4 areas a lot and despite some variations in how levels are laid out, they still fall under the same themes of fire/dungeon etc should be warned that if you want variety you won't find it here.

Every run through the game's 4 levels is different due to the many varied power-ups, both permanent and temporary, that you as the player have to choose from huge number of upgrades, weapons, synergies

I've rarely heard the same line twice in +60h still amazes me.

this is seriously lacking and does not provide enough content to justify the tons of runs on the very same content required to unlock the aspects and advance the stories

The game's layout stays relatively the same. There are 4 levels you go through. The enemy types are always the same, the bosses have slight variations (after tinkering with difficulty) with the final boss being identical every run.

This limited amount of biomes, enemies, bosses and gods

At the start of each run you pick a legendary weapon, like the Aegis shield

work towards were the weapon aspects, which are slight alterations to how a weapon functions. For my preferred weapon of choice, the spear, these aspects included a change to the spin attack that I never used and an alteration to the spear toss, something I only ever used when I got specific surprising amount of tactical depth from half a dozen weapon types

and a deceptively simple moveset comprising standard, heavy and ranged attacks; a rechargeable super; and a dash. upgrades for it in a run. To me, these upgrades felt worthless, and on top of that, they had a high cost in a rare upgrade material: titan blood.

surprising amount of tactical depth from half a dozen weapon types and a deceptively simple moveset comprising standard, heavy and ranged attacks; a rechargeable super; and a dash. sheer volume of variables in this 'finished', fully-featured 1.0 release (also available on Nintendo Switch) is mind-boggling  
However once you fall under Hades' spell after a couple of runs the near limitless combinations of character builds becomes bewitching.

Each jewel in Zagreus' armoury – brass-knuckles, greatshield and sword, railgun, spear – has its own rhythm: some favour quick flurries at close range, others charge up to unleash hell on rooms full of gorgons and cursed chariots. Conquered chambers sometimes bring a new blessing from one of Zagreus' relatives up on Mount Olympus,  
These abilities arrive in endless new combinations, starting fresh each time you set foot into Tartarus. It makes each run at the underworld exciting and different, even with the same few weapons; each time you think, yes, this is the build that's going to get me past the hydra or the minotaur.

deceptively simple combat arsenal. I have a basic attack, a special move, a dash, and a ranged attack called a Cast that fires a ranged barb that sticks into enemies for a brief time. And I have these attacks for each of my six weapons — but I can select only one weapon prior to each run. I can upgrade and alter each of these moves every run, and they combine into something unique every time I play.  
This boss fight has a few different varieties

But each individual run is shaped by the gods you meet and the things you choose when they offer you a handful of their themed perks to pick from. Like the contents of the shopkeeper's store in Spelunky, this stuff can really mix things up and define an adventure. And the choices are often almost impossible. A dash that poisons or an attack that poisons? More doom or a brand new special? Do I want the people I have already killed, right, to make living enemies sick?  
but what really clicks for me is the way that this procedural game allows you to procedurally clip together your own Zagreus each time, and each time it's bittersweet because you know things won't fall together in quite this way ever again. It's sad in Spelunky when I don't get the jetpack,

Its ever-changing labyrinth is a hall of mirrors, but not in a maliciously deceptive way.  
My method, crude though it might be, works. But I've also watched my partner, friends, and various Twitch streamers take other approaches

Each of these Infernal Arms is geared to complement a certain playstyle. Want to get in the thick of it and wreck some demons? Then consider the straightforward Stygian Blade. Prefer to peck at foes from a safe distance? Then channel your inner Artemis and use the bow. Later you'll unlock a bashing shield, a spear, and more, and each plays significantly differently, creating one of many layers of replayability for Hades.

Their aid comes in the form of boons (run-specific tokens from the gods that grant Zag godly power-ups) that modify to Zag's abilities, making every run feel new and unique. Some are smaller, min-max stat-worthy benefits that often feel like a daily vitamin. You're constantly given incentive to shake up your playstyle.

endlessly repeatable appeal of random buffs, modifiers, random enemy layouts, currencies, and progression that slowly turn the seemingly impossible task of reaching the surface into something manageable.

Each of the six weapons you can equip pushes you to play differently, and weapon-specific modifiers nudge you towards using different parts of your toolset;

The sixth axis

Because of this, your build is going to be absurdly fluid and will be vastly different from run to run. It helps that each of the weapons also feels completely different too.

the satisfying and tight gameplay and the glimpses into the lore will entice you to keep up playing

in procedurally scrambled rooms that have their own deadly doodads.

You choose which rooms to travel through from a handful of doors that appear when you clear out all the baddies. Generally you're picking between what kind of pay-off you want once the next battle is done. The old gods were so baldly transactional. More health? One of a handful of in-game currencies for levelling up over time? Or a chance to get a gift from the squabbling cast of ancients?

## Engaging Combat

What sets Hades apart isn't just that it's a great roguelike with the kind of repeatable depth that makes it engrossing to play for hours,

Each of the six weapons you can equip pushes you to play differently, and weapon-specific modifiers nudge you towards using different parts of your toolset; you might be comfortable poking enemies from afar with the Varatha spear, for example, but with a boon from Daedalus that triples the damage of your dash attack, you're going to want to close the distance and juke constantly. That, and how buffs interact in myriad surprising and effective ways, means I'm still not tired of making these runs, dozens of hours later.

While some players, myself included, have reached Hades' final scene, they still haven't puzzled out exactly what number of runs or other preconditions trigger it. But as with everything else in the game, it seems to be inevitable. You just have to keep making runs and talking to characters, who react to the sudden return of their queen. You just have to stick with it.

While sticking with Hades for what I thought was going to be an additional day but turned out to be an additional week of late-night "just one more run" sessions,



Like me, after a couple of successful escapes you may find yourself thinking, "How can I make subsequent attempts harder?" Enter the Pacts of Punishment, a challenge board that allows you to activate a number of modifiers to make Hades even more challenging. Toggling one on adds allows you to earn new rewards, making every playthrough fresh and exciting.

But even when I beat that boss and finish my journey, it's not over. The game tempts me with new materials to upgrade my weapons further and customize my home. But no matter how many runs I win or how many times I've fallen, I'm always jumping out that window again, just trying to see what that first upgrade will be, and then the next, and then the next.

Every time I tried out a new Hades patch, I would get lost in an endless cycle of runs for a week, and all my gaming time would disappear. Hades has always been so good that it's hard to put down,

Whether it's the game's smooth combat, deep loot systems, or engrossing story, I'm always motivated to boot it up and go for another run.

Return back to the beginning, only to get to know the characters.

Then the addiction of trying to escape again kicks in....

And it gets late....

Just going to try one more time.

I also need items!

But I hate lava. :S

Still have lingering addiction to this game. "I want to play Hades"

Despite how frustrating and repetitive it can be. Stills gives a thrill of each try.

And farming .. Getting enough, and then the reward for it. Sometimes it feels like I don't get anything at all cause I require more nectar or gems than each run gives.

And is fun to fight enemies ~~

When I wrote this review, I was at 51 h .. Now at 113 h

I still haven't completed all the side stories yet ... Hoping for the the dialouge to show up can feel like an eternity. Heh.

Just to add my positive review to the pile: Hades has been one of the most addictive games I've played in a while, in the best sense of the word.

In the first few runs, it might be hard to spot any significant progress, or it might seem very difficult to even enjoy it. But the gorgeous visuals, the great voice acting, the satisfying and tight gameplay and the glimpses into the lore will entice you to keep up playing.

Then, the huge number of upgrades, weapons, synergies, dialogues, challenges, modifiers, etc... will make you stay and enjoy it like a kid. Once you get into it, you have to play A LOT before it feels repetitive. The fact that each dialogue is voice acted and that I've rarely heard the same line twice in +60h still amazes me.

Hades has all the stuff that makes Supergiant's games awesome, but it's fourteen times bigger and with almost infinite replayability. Very recommended.

-The combat alone is amazing and the game is a must-play just for that. It's fast, varied, tactical, flashy, intuitive and super fun...

-The roguelike elements serve their purpose incredibly well. A perfect blend of permanent progression and randomized items and upgrades lost on death means that each run is unique and engaging, but you can also feel yourself progressing and becoming stronger. What all of this means is that the game warrants being played again and again and again which is great, considering how fun it is.

Great game. It is nailing the gameplay loop to make it fun and addictive. After every run you go to the hub and even if you did not succeed, you will have some new dialogues, events, you will upgrade the character, unlock new weapon... something new will happen almost every time. And once you unlock the upgrades, you just want to start again to see how it affects next run. So you keep doing this loop (unlock new stuff, test new stuff) until next morning :-D

Update: After 50+ "deaths", finally reached the ending, the story is well told that even the game credits will keep you watching. And will keep playing the game to unlock more story lines and weapon aspects.

Fantastic game. Played it on Xbox One X and it is fast, beautiful and seriously addictive. I have finished Dead Cells, Hollow Knight, The Ascent, Children of Morta, etc, and it is by far the best one..

One small warning: A serious time sink.

When you finally decide to take another stab at escaping, runs are broken up into a few different worlds, each made up of several randomly ordered chambers. Hades' combat builds on Bastion's tight, isometric fights and infuses them with the endlessly repeatable appeal of random buffs, modifiers, random enemy layouts, currencies, and progression that slowly turn the seemingly impossible task of reaching the surface into something manageable.

it is a game whose structure and story are both rooted in repeated, inescapable failure

Given the number of possible permutations of your progress both through the game and with various characters, it is a mind-bogglingly complex narrative system that somehow manages to feel coherent at almost all times.

Hades presents the illusion of difficulty and a brutal learning curve, but it ensures that, no matter what, everybody will eventually get over the finish line. Its ever-changing labyrinth is a hall of mirrors, but not in a maliciously deceptive way.

When you finally decide to take another stab at escaping, runs are broken up into a few different worlds, each made up of several randomly ordered chambers. Hades' combat builds on Bastion's tight, isometric fights and infuses them with the endlessly repeatable appeal of random buffs, modifiers, random enemy layouts, currencies, and progression that slowly turn the seemingly impossible task of reaching the surface into something manageable.

Combat is quick and reactive, letting you chain attacks into dashes, dashes into special moves, and so on as you learn how to whittle enemy shields, avoid traps, and work over bosses.

Occasionally, you'll run into rooms where you can score two boons, but only after choosing one god and facing the wrath of the one you scorned as you fight off another round of enemies. Or, if you happen to end up with both that deflective dash and some critical damage, like I did, Athena and Artemis might have a quick chat with each other, then offer you a Duo boon that grants bonus critical damage to projectiles you deflect. As you progress through hell, you'll start seeing those boons used against you, which itself says something;

It's the kind of story that makes small moments more significant. After being chided by Hades with a dismissive "Back again?" having failed to kill a boss, then listening to everyone around simply wring their hands about the lord of the dead,

Rather than face an imposing boss, learning about a new twist of fate, and then moving on to the next act, you have hundreds of conversations with your family, roommates, and enemies about whatever comes to mind.

it is a game whose structure and story are both rooted in repeated, inescapable failure

you try to slash, shield bash, spear, bow, punch, and gun your way out of hell, but no matter how many demonic shades fall after (ode to a Grecian) earning your ire, you end up back where you started.

Supergiant describes Hades as a roguelike, but only because there's not really a good genre descriptor that sums up what it really is. In between action-based runs through the ever-shifting halls of Tartarus, Asphodel, Elysium, and the Temple of Styx, you spend ample time talking to various gods, goddesses, shades (ghosts, basically), and Dusa, who defies categorization.

Given the number of possible permutations of your progress both through the game and with various characters, it is a mind-bogglingly complex narrative system that somehow manages to feel coherent at almost all times.

I've heard a few of them express frustration about particular bosses or their struggles in certain areas. I always tell them: "Give it a few more runs. You'll get past that part, and then, a few more runs after that, you'll be amazed that you ever had trouble in the first place."

Hades presents the illusion of difficulty and a brutal learning curve, but it ensures that, no matter what, everybody will eventually get over the finish line. Its ever-changing labyrinth is a hall of mirrors, but not in a maliciously deceptive way.

items that can be used to permanently boost your stats, making you better able to withstand whatever challenges you face.

Fights also do a subtly sublime job of preparing you for future fights; enemies and bosses call forward to each other.

Even if you're having trouble making bone-heads or bone-tails of its attack patterns, you'll eventually gain enough HP and death defiances (think "lives" in classic games) that you'll have ample room for error. If that's not enough, you can also toggle on "God Mode," which gives a slight, steadily increasing boost to your damage resistance after each failed run.

Each Hades run is full of randomized powerups and "boons" from various gods and goddesses that imbue Zagreus with additional powerful abilities but only last until you die.

No matter how you play, you experience the tension of staring down imposing bosses, the thrill of accidentally assembling your dream build. You die a whole, whole lot, but you do it at your own pace.

It takes a long, long, long time for Zagreus' relationships with his closest blood relatives to improve, but in the meantime, he creates meaningful bonds with his found family and makes his homeland a more livable place.

While some players, myself included, have reached Hades' final scene, they still haven't puzzled out exactly what number of runs or other preconditions trigger it. But as with everything else in the game, it seems to be inevitable. You just have to keep making runs and talking to characters, who react to the sudden return of their queen. You just have to stick with it.

This first attempt ended at the first boss, Megaera. In later runs she is practically a pushover, but my inexperience and difficulty in reading her movements cost me in the end. Not exactly the ending I had in mind, but that was almost at the end of the first region. Considering my prior experience with rogue-likes in *Binding of Isaac*, my expectations were set a bit too high for what future content may be in store for me.

Upon death, I was revived back in the underworld in a hub of sorts. It was here that I learned what the use of all of the other trinkets were: darkness to unlock permanent upgrades like restoring health between rooms and revivals, keys to unlock more upgrade options and new weapon choices, nectar to trade for passive keepsakes, and treasure to give slight bonuses during the runs such as money-filled urns.

The keepsakes from nectar were a one-time thing from each NPC, so I realistically only needed a couple of them. The best nectar rewards I found were from the hub area (Cerberus and Skelly), so I really didn't need any more nectar, though I did try a good number of them in hopes of getting something else worthwhile.

Any nectar given beyond the keepsake was purely for narrative purposes, something I found little to no interest in going forward. The majority of the treasure trades involved mere cosmetics to the hub, hardly worth the effort in acquiring. Therefore, I found that the most valuable resources were darkness and keys, as they were the key to the more consistent permanent upgrades. After taking another couple runs seeing what was beyond Megaera, I decided to spend a few runs dedicated to solely getting more darkness and keys. The most valuable upgrade was Death Defiance, a revival ability giving a lot of wiggle room for

mistakes going forward. Once I had a few abilities maxed out and every weapon unlocked, it was time to see what more Hades had in store for me.

With newfound power in hand, I effortlessly made my way past the second region, Asphodel. The boss there, the Bone Hydra, was an absolute joke with my newly obtained spear. Elysium, on the other hand, felt fairly ordinary. Tartarus was an interesting, yet standard opening region, and Asphodel introduced dangerous lava everywhere creating a thematic difference. Going to Elysium felt too similar to Tartarus, but that's a minor complaint in the grand scheme of things.

A solemn ending sequence led me to Zagreus' mother, Persephone, only for him to promptly die and get revived back in the underworld once again. There was no danger there, just a story beat that, no matter what, death is inevitable after reaching that point. I was told to go back and do it again, with the game offering a small dialogue with Persephone each time I did so. This felt like a slap in the face to my expectations – that's it? No more biomes? At this point, the gameplay had gotten a bit stale to me.

The only new gameplay content I could work towards were the weapon aspects, which are slight alterations to how a weapon functions. For my preferred weapon of choice, the spear, these aspects included a change to the spin attack that I never used and an alteration to the spear toss, something I only ever used when I got specific upgrades for it in a run. To me, these upgrades felt worthless, and on top of that, they had a high cost in a rare upgrade material: titan blood.

Titan blood is only obtained as drops from a couple of the bosses, and those drops don't reset on a new run unless the difficulty, known as heat, is cranked up. Thus a loop is created of slowly playing through the game repeatedly for meager gameplay rewards. There's no longer any motivation for me to keep playing. There's nothing to play for.

It lives to clobber. Room after room of hell. You turn up and wait for horrors. The horrors arrive and, jeepers, you shred them. You pulverize them. I have never felt so sorry for the stuff of nightmares.

This might be one of my favourite things about Hades. Over many runs you get stronger and last longer and get different weapons to try out.

When it's done it's back to Dad's house to mope into the bedroom, spend a few upgrade points, chat to the relatives and then head out once more.

The journey of Zagreus, son of Hades, through the labyrinthine Underworld toward the freedom of the mortal realm unfolds from an isometric perspective as you take on hordes of colorfully animated undead that fill the screen with danger in every randomly ordered room you pass through.

Almost inevitably, though, the forces of Hades will overwhelm you eventually, and every death sends Zag back home to start over from scratch, save for persistent currencies and progress in relationships with the wonderful cast of characters who inhabit the Underworld,

from lord Hades himself all the way down. So you're going to be spending a lot of time getting to know everyone -- and it's time very well spent.

It turns out that adding a dash of dating simulator mechanics to a rogue-lite was the secret sauce in making good use of a large cast of interesting characters.

Sisyphus as a tragic character, he's an optimist who you encounter on a break while the gods aren't watching.

Not only are conversations and side stories actively engaging -- attempting to reunite Achilles with his life-long partner, Patroclus, or Orpheus with his long-lost muse Euridice, are genuinely moving and hearken back to the kind of melodrama the ancient Greeks were so good at -- there are also gameplay benefits!

Like me, after a couple of successful escapes you may find yourself thinking, "How can I make subsequent attempts harder?" Enter the Pacts of Punishment, a challenge board that allows you to activate a number of modifiers to make Hades even more challenging. Toggling one on adds allows you to earn new rewards, making every playthrough fresh and exciting.

With each death Zagreus is sent back to the House of Hades where his father judges souls and legends gather. Doing a circuit of the court to see what new things they have to say (and give Cerberus a pat), lets you wind down and take a breath after your latest death has left your hands shaking. When I die in Dead Cells I want to quit, but in Hades the sting's immediately removed because I get to chat with an embodiment of night and see what's up with Orpheus. Then, back in the zone, I buy another round of upgrades and try again.

At the start of each run you pick a legendary weapon, like the Aegis shield, accept a boon, like the one from Dionysus that adds hangover damage (read "poison") to your attacks, and enter the first of the underworld's three realms.

They're made up of randomized chambers where a set number of enemies spawn, you vanquish them, collect a reward, and enter the next chamber.

Gold coins, obols from the eyes of the dead, can be spent at Charon's shop when it pops up in a chamber for temporary buffs and heals, while shards of darkness can be spent in the House of Hades for permanent upgrades, like backstab damage or the ability to defy death and come back at half-health when you'd otherwise fall. Gems buy renovations for the hub but also for the underworld, adding rooms with healing pools or urns that can be smashed for obols.

And my frequent attempts to escape his grasp make up one of the best games I've played all year.

I obliterate the minions of Hades through random room after random room filled with the cloudy, lost souls hoping to send me back to where I started. I'm awarded a different upgrade after every battle. My strength grows, giving me the power I need to climb even higher as I try to reach the surface. But as always happens in games like Hades, I make a

misstep, I lose all my health, and I die. I fall into a pool of blood and go back to where I started.

But when I wake up back at home, Hades reveals its true nature. It's a game where each attempt to get to the end is a run where I battle through the world, collect some resources, and start over with new, permanent upgrades.

I enter my room to spend some currency I found on my last run — upgrading myself and increasing my chances at success — and move into the armory. I collect a trinket — gifts from my loved ones — talk to Skelly, my sentient practice dummy, and select a weapon from Hades' arsenal.

When I first land in the courtyard of Tartarus, the game randomly offers me one of two things: a Boon or a Daedalus Hammer.

Healing doesn't come easy in Hades, and I take every piece of food, healing fountain, or health bonus I can find. But my failure takes time. At first, I'm sent back to the House of Hades when my health hits zero, but as I go, I gain the ability to revive myself multiple times each run.

But even when I beat that boss and finish my journey, it's not over. The game tempts me with new materials to upgrade my weapons further and customize my home. But no matter how many runs I win or how many times I've fallen, I'm always jumping out that window again, just trying to see what that first upgrade will be, and then the next, and then the next.

Whether it's the game's smooth combat, deep loot systems, or engrossing story, I'm always motivated to boot it up and go for another run. I'm like a shamed teenager, ready to start again.

In most games of this nature, where each attempt strips you of progress and hard-won powers, being sent back to the start makes me want to quit. But when Zagreus re-emerges into the chambers of Hades, there are gossiping shades and surly servants; the lord of the underworld grumbles over stacks of paperwork, barely glancing upwards to reprimand his son for his latest escape attempt. I am quickly distracted from my failure by some words of sympathy from Nyx, or Megaera mooching in the corner. And before long I am back at it,

This story is all wrapped around Hades' compelling action gameplay. You dodge, use a basic attack, a charge attack, a special attack, and a magic attack. The dodge is a constant, the weapon attacks are all based on which of the six weapons you've got equipped, and the magic attack is dictated by whichever god you've decided to cosy up to.

You see, outside of the permanent upgrades you can unlock, the vast majority of your power-ups come in the form of boons offered to you by the gods of Olympus. While each of the gods offers basic improvements to your stats, they also specialise in some kind of status effect or alteration. Zeus, for example, is all about lightning. Ares, the one true god of war, gets two effects, one called Doom which does heavy damage a short while after you've hit something, and the other called a Blade Rift, which basically summons spinning swords in set places.

You get special rewards for using each of these weapons and beating the bosses as you make your way up to the surface, and each of those rewards unlocks some other kind of permanent progression. It's all just very clever, and you can even build your relationship with each of the characters you meet to learn more about both them and yourself.

Hades applies the formula expertly to an equally polished isometric action RPG brawler, creating sadistic assault courses from strings of standalone rooms populated by an amusing menagerie of netherworldly creations, dastardly traps and melodramatic deities drawn from Greek mythology.

I get killed.

Return back to the beginning, only to get to know the characters.

Then the addiction of trying to escape again kicks in....

And it gets late....

Just going to try one more time.

I also need items!

But I hate lava. :S

...

Seems like a lot of media tried framing this game as having "fixed" the roguelike genre, but I think it actually pulls out some of the worst bits of it. Especially being someone who prefers roguelikes \*without\* persistent upgrades. As I'd rather have the emphasis on skill development, over grinding. Give me a sandbox to master, not a hamster wheel to run. Hades unfortunately is similar to something like Rogue Legacy, where it begins to feel grindy and padded after a point. Unlike Isaac - a game that does unlocks and mandatory multiple playthroughs pretty well - where there's a ridiculous amount of new stuff to find after every run .

...but Hades' well runs dry after a point. At least, gameplay-wise.

The game somehow does both story and good repeatable gameplay at the same time. Every run through the game's 4 levels is different due to the many varied power-ups, both permanent and temporary, that you as the player have to choose from. That, coupled with several different weapons and the fantastic array of characters you meet along the way, makes this game a solid 10/10. And I didn't even mention the outstanding soundtrack.

-The combat alone is amazing and the game is a must-play just for that. It's fast, varied, tactical, flashy, intuitive and super fun...

-The roguelike elements serve their purpose incredibly well. A perfect blend of permanent progression and randomized items and upgrades lost on death means that each run is unique and engaging, but you can also feel yourself progressing and becoming stronger. What all of this means is that the game warrants being played again and again and again which is great, considering how fun it is.

The first few hours dedicated to beat the final boss are perfect. Good learning curve, new weapons unlocking, learning each biome, and the game is gorgeous. And then I beat the boss.



The game has several resources that you will collect during gameplay runs. Those resources are then spent between runs, either for upgrades, cosmetics, or advancing the story/lore. This meta progression is a "hook": it drives new players to gather as many of those resources as possible, to unlock all of the content. The game essentially drip-feeds content to keep the player invested, run after run.

Often, you'll want to pursue a quest with a particular character, who will be conveniently absent until a few more runs, as an attempt to pad the game's length. Often, collecting those resources will be more important than picking options that are good for your current run.

This game is amazing! A fantastical history with a incredible gameplay. All of the players need to play this rogue like.

Perfect gameplay loop keeps you wanting to try one more run. Story that continues to expand in a meaningful way; doesn't feel padded.

Great game. It is nailing the gameplay loop to make it fun and addictive. After every run you go to the hub and even if you did not succeed, you will have some new dialogues, events, you will upgrade the character, unlock new weapon... something new will happen almost every time. And once you unlock the upgrades, you just want to start again to see how it affects next run. So you keep doing this loop (unlock new stuff, test new stuff) until next morning :-D

I had fun with this for the 15-20 hours that I played it, but never did finish it. It's a roguelike with some additional light RPG elements (i.e., you actually level up certain stats to make the game easier once if you die). My issue is that the runs are a bit too long. I kept dying on the end boss because I didn't understand its attack patterns well. Well, those deaths took me an hour to come back from, minimum. I get that's a staple of the roguelike genre, but it lost me. I had a blast in the first 10 to 20 runs as I saw constant improvement, but that flattens. It was a good game to play to wind down for the night after a dinner out (Sept. and Oct. of 2020 - the brief time we could go out!) but won't stick with me for the long term.

In fairness, Hades' game loop is refreshingly tight: resurrect after death, banter a few dialogue lines with various mythological characters at home, buy small character upgrades, venture out on a dungeon crawl through the same levels, collect single-run powerups to aid your attempt, die, and...do it all again. The combat feels punchy, and the multifarious mixture of weapons and single-run powers (boons) makes for a few hours of interesting combat. After that, it begins to feel like a smear of generic, furious button-mashing.

For me, the game loop was a double-edged sword. While tight, it became boring after a dozen escape attempts. The dialogue interludes are overwhelmingly facile permutations of "You shouldn't try to leave the Underworld, Zagreus!", or "You'll make it out eventually, boyo!" That, along with the glacially slowly unfolding story, and the mostly minor per-run character upgrades, just wasn't enough to motivate me to keep playing. I narrowly died to the final boss in run 16 and could only stomach a few more attempts before the allure of other games overwhelmed my motivation to slog through another Greek Groundhog Day escape attempt.

The core gameplay is fun, and the game looks and sounds good. But the combat can be a visual mess, the story and characters lack any emotional depth, and you need to be

prepared to play the game through 20+ times to reach the ending. And the ending itself is a big ol' slap in the face anticlimax.

The gameplay of Hades revolves around the rogue-like mechanics - you start at your base and go as far as you can, powering up along the way; if you die, you start over. Hades does well as it allows you to level up some abilities permanently, but for me this wasn't quite enough as you still lose most of your gains when you die, a key tenet of rogue-likes. The downside of this is that it's demotivating, especially as you have to traverse every area back to where you were, so it's quite frustrating if you're at the final boss, for example.

The gameplay itself is pretty tight and flawless. You can unlock a variety of weapons to battle against repetition and I found combat quite engaging to the point I wanted to play more, but also annoying when I had to start from the very first area each time.

Hades has a God mode, which I wish I had switched on as soon as I started the game as it increases your defence after each death, helping to prevent tedium and repetition.

Combat is quick and reactive, letting you chain attacks into dashes, dashes into special moves, and so on as you learn how to whittle enemy shields, avoid traps, and work over bosses.

Occasionally, you'll run into rooms where you can score two boons, but only after choosing one god and facing the wrath of the one you scorned as you fight off another round of enemies. Or, if you happen to end up with both that deflective dash and some critical damage, like I did, Athena and Artemis might have a quick chat with each other, then offer you a Duo boon that grants bonus critical damage to projectiles you deflect. As you progress through hell, you'll start seeing those boons used against you, which itself says something;

Getting into a rhythm, launching a combo then zooming around the battlefield like I've got wings on my sandals, puts me in such a focused flow-state I don't notice the soundtrack accentuating the action.

And my frequent attempts to escape his grasp make up one of the best games I've played all year.

Powered by chugging guitars, frenetic fighting and luscious, flamboyant depictions of figures from Greek mythology, this excellent action game from the arthouse studio Supergiant has been many years in the making. We play as Zagreus, wayward son of the underworld, trying to escape his father's gloomy domain and see the world above. As an immortal, he cannot die – but each time he is defeated by the denizens of the underworld, whether by the fallen warriors of Elysium or the flaming skulls and witches in Tartarus, he is returned to his bedroom like a shamed teenager, ready to start again.

This is the kind of video game fighting that puts your heart in your mouth, an exhilarating whirl of slashes and strikes and dodges. Each jewel in Zagreus' armoury – brass-knuckles, greatshield and sword, railgun, spear – has its own rhythm: some favour quick flurries at close range, others charge up to unleash hell on rooms full of gorgons and cursed chariots. Conquered chambers sometimes bring a new blessing from one of Zagreus' relatives up on

Mount Olympus, boons that add a watery damage-dealing flourish to your dash or imbue your weapon with lightning, calls that summon gods to unleash magical arrows or make you invincible.

This story is all wrapped around Hades' compelling action gameplay. You dodge, use a basic attack, a charge attack, a special attack, and a magic attack. The dodge is a constant, the weapon attacks are all based on which of the six weapons you've got equipped, and the magic attack is dictated by whichever god you've decided to cosy up to.

You see, outside of the permanent upgrades you can unlock, the vast majority of your power-ups come in the form of boons offered to you by the gods of Olympus. While each of the gods offers basic improvements to your stats, they also specialise in some kind of status effect or alteration. Zeus, for example, is all about lightning. Ares, the one true god of war, gets two effects, one called Doom which does heavy damage a short while after you've hit something, and the other called a Blade Rift, which basically summons spinning swords in set places.

Combat is crisp, chaotic and perfectly pitched on just the right side of frustrating.

In so few cases does narrative shine through in a roguelike/roguelite, but Supergiant have absolutely nailed it with Hades, each death (and you will die, a lot) allows you to bring forward resources to increase your survivability, having the cast of characters about the house of Hades comment on your last run and how you met your grizzly end makes the world feel lived in and quickly gives insight to who these people are, pair that with frenetic fast paced combat, game changing divine boons that synergise in all kinds of weird and wonderful ways,

Hades is incredibly fun and immersive! Never a dull moment, the action is fast-paced yet the game play is surprisingly well balanced, not frustratingly difficult but gives enough challenge to motivate the player to move forward. The graphics are colorful and well-drawn, plus the characters are all interesting and given life with decent voice-acting. Controls are intuitive and responsive, movements are fluid, and load times between areas are tolerable.

but its not as bothersome due to the fast-paced action, variety of monsters, traps and rewards. There is also a "handicap" system, that allows the player to customize various difficulty options to earn important items to unlock weapon abilities, and gift to each character to advance their own story lines. Overall, Hades is a superb quality game from Supergiant, well worth the price and sets a benchmark for future games.

Combat is crisp, chaotic and perfectly pitched on just the right side of frustrating.

conjure a surprising amount of tactical depth from half a dozen weapon types and a deceptively simple moveset comprising standard, heavy and ranged attacks; a rechargeable super; and a dash.

The magic is provided by boons - quite literally gifts from the gods your character

Zeus imbues your attacks with lightning damage which can jump from foe to foe; Dionysus add a hangover effect which damages enemies over time; and Aphrodite allows you to charm enemies, who then fight by your side.

You dodge, use a basic attack, a charge attack, a special attack, and a magic attack. The dodge is a constant, the weapon attacks are all based on which of the six weapons you've got equipped, and the magic attack is dictated by whichever god you've decided to cosy up to.

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boons that add a watery damage-dealing flourish to your dash or imbue your weapon with lightning, calls that summon gods to unleash magical arrows or make you invincible.

I pick up a random upgrade on my way out the door, increasing my combat potential or drastically altering the way I battle.

But when I wake up back at home, Hades reveals its true nature. It's a game where each attempt to get to the end is a run where I battle through the world, collect some resources, and start over with new, permanent upgrades.

I collect a trinket — gifts from my loved ones — talk to Skelly, my sentient practice dummy, and select a weapon from Hades' arsenal.

but most of the time I'm a red blur dashing between enemies.

As Zagreus, I have a deceptively simple combat arsenal. I have a basic attack, a special move, a dash, and a ranged attack called a Cast that fires a ranged barb that sticks into enemies for a brief time.

The Daedalus Hammer is one of the most desirable upgrades in the game, dramatically altering how my weapon works. For example, the special ability on the shield is a Captain America-type throw that bounces between a few targets before returning to me. The Daedalus Hammer increases the number of times my shield bounces between enemies. This may not sound exciting at first, but combined with powerful Boons, it could be the key to my escape attempt.

These Boons offer me minor effects that impact various aspects of combat, usually focused on my attack, special, or Cast. If I pick up the Daedalus upgrade that lets my shield bounce, maybe I would want to find a Zeus Boon that causes my special to spawn lightning bolts on every enemy hit by my special attack? Or a Boon from Dionysus that transforms my Cast into a hazy pool that stuns and poisons targets inside, keeping them still for my shield to bounce.

This boss fight has a few different varieties, which can change things up between runs. But aside from a few, altered moves, it's a consistent experience. If I choose upgrades that focus Zagreus' power too much on clearing rooms filled with basic enemies, I may struggle on the boss fight. And if I focus too much on a boss-killing Zagreus build, I'll suffer on my way there. When I succeed, I get a brief moment to rest and heal before moving on to the next area of the underworld.

Whether it's the game's smooth combat, deep loot systems, or engrossing story, I'm always motivated to boot it up and go for another run.

At the start of each run you pick a legendary weapon, like the Aegis shield, accept a boon, like the one from Dionysus that adds hangover damage (read "poison") to your attacks, and enter the first of the underworld's three realms. They're made up of randomized chambers where a set number of enemies spawn, you vanquish them, collect a reward, and enter the next chamber.

Every weapon's agreeably unique. Hold down attack with the shield and you'll block, then bull-rush forward. Its special lets you bounce it off enemies then catch it like Hellenic Captain America. The spear can also be thrown and recalled, but only comes back when commanded, letting you reposition first and line up new shades to skewer, while its hold-down attack is an area-of-effect spin. Then there's the Adamant Rail, which is literally a gun, complete with grenade launcher attachment.

In addition you've got a ranged attack called a cast and can unlock a call, an ultimate granted by whichever god you've got favor with that's earned by filling up a god gauge. I often forget about the call because that gauge doesn't stand out beneath the attention-grabbing red health bar, though sometimes a text pop-up will remind me (probably because the game knows I rarely use the thing).

The real star in your arsenal is a dash that can take you through enemies and objects, and combines with attacks for a dash-strike. Whoever's responsible for the timing and animation should pat themselves on the back, because dashing feels great, whether used to backstab a skeleton, or to warp through a column just as the minotaur charges so he slams his cowlick into a big lump of marble instead of me.

Mobility's essential, not just to avoid attacks but to set up wall slams for bonus damage, trigger traps then dash out of the blast zone, and knock down support columns to bring down chunks of masonry. Getting into a rhythm, launching a combo then zooming around the battlefield like I've got wings on my sandals, puts me in such a focused flow-state I don't notice the soundtrack accentuating the action. If a game can distract me from Darren Korb rocking out then it's doing everything right.

But what if that Herculean climb uphill was actually awesome combat against a randomized variety of enemies as you fight your way out of Hell, with a wide range of godly powers that grow and combine in interesting ways as you progress?

as you take on hordes of colorfully animated undead that fill the screen with danger in every randomly ordered room you pass through. Fortunately, Zag is a skilled warrior capable of wielding six different weapons, each with four different variants. Each of these Infernal Arms is geared to complement a certain playstyle. Want to get in the thick of it and wreck some demons? Then consider the straightforward Stygian Blade. Prefer to peck at foes from a safe distance? Then channel your inner Artemis and use the bow. Later you'll unlock a bashing shield, a spear, and more, and each plays significantly differently, creating one of many layers of replayability for Hades.

Regardless of your weapon of choice, Zag can use a dash to dart out of trouble or to get into a more advantageous position.

The final mechanic in Zag's moveset is the cast: a skill-shot based projectile that fires a red jewel into an enemy for a quick burst of damage. The jewel embeds itself into a target, disqualifying you from firing another cast until you kill the enemy and retrieve your ammunition, so shooting it at the biggest, meanest enemy in the room isn't always the best idea. As with each one of Zag's moves, using it well involves a delicate balance between risk and reward.

Almost inevitably, though, the forces of Hades will overwhelm you eventually, and every death sends Zag back home to start over from scratch,

Poseidon may be your bestie early on in your quest, but choose Dionysus over him in a later Trial and he won't hesitate to make your life a living hell in this particular chamber.

Hades feels like a response to that, a Supergiant game that focuses on the fighting and elevates it to the absolute top-tier. This isn't a spoiler because you've looked at the score, but they nailed it. The combat's fantastic.

As Zagreus, the son of Hades, you try to slash, shield bash, spear, bow, punch, and gun your way out of hell, but no matter how many demonic shades fall after (ode to a Grecian) earning your ire, you end up back where you started.

These relationships mean that Hades' goals are fundamentally different from those of other roguelikes, many of which prioritize difficulty and mastery above all else. Hades builds upon that foundation, but despite a focus on failure, the game isn't actually about the player beating their head against a series of brick walls until they finally break through.

Each Hades run is full of randomized powerups and "boons" from various gods and goddesses that imbue Zagreus with additional powerful abilities but only last until you die. To give just a small handful of examples: Athena can put a shield around your default dash ability, allowing you to slam enemies' projectile attacks back into them. Ares can add "Doom" to your regular or special attacks, which causes enemies to take a burst of damage after

they've been hit (you can stack these bursts and add all kinds of fun modifiers to them, too). Artemis can boost your critical hit chance through the roof. Zeus adds lightning to abilities, because that is his main thing (aside from very bad horny decisions).

A multifaceted story that unfolds based on how you play, sublime combat that rewards experimentation, challenges that are only as difficult as you want them to be, all the good feelings of roguelikes without a lot of the hassle.

he sets out to escape to the world of the living, battling various undead monsters, living creatures, and mythological figures on his way out.

There, figures such as Achilles, Hypnos, and Nyx console you after your deaths, praise you for making progress, and confide in you about one another. You chat with them, undertake side quests, and exchange gifts to deepen your relationships. Eventually, they become vital allies on your quest, even if they're not in the thick of combat with you.

These interactions, as much as the precise combat, are the reason I kept coming back to Hades;

When you finally decide to take another stab at escaping, runs are broken up into a few different worlds, each made up of several randomly ordered chambers. Hades' combat builds on Bastion's tight, isometric fights and infuses them with the endlessly repeatable appeal of random buffs, modifiers, random enemy layouts, currencies, and progression that slowly turn the seemingly impossible task of reaching the surface into something manageable.

Combat is quick and reactive, letting you chain attacks into dashes, dashes into special moves, and so on as you learn how to whittle enemy shields, avoid traps, and work over bosses. Each of the six weapons you can equip pushes you to play differently, and weapon-specific modifiers nudge you towards using different parts of your toolset; you might be comfortable poking enemies from afar with the Varatha spear, for example, but with a boon from Daedalus that triples the damage of your dash attack, you're going to want to close the distance and juke constantly.

Other than that, though, combat is an outstanding mix of random variables and consistent action.

And even as you're contemplating whether you want your spear to deal bonus critical damage or imbue your dash with a deflecting shield, tantalizing narrative threads seep through.

Occasionally, you'll run into rooms where you can score two boons, but only after choosing one god and facing the wrath of the one you scorned as you fight off another round of enemies. Or, if you happen to end up with both that deflective dash and some critical damage, like I did, Athena and Artemis might have a quick chat with each other, then offer you a Duo boon that grants bonus critical damage to projectiles you deflect. As you progress through hell, you'll start seeing those boons used against you, which itself says something;

But I wanted to keep learning more about these characters and this underworld enough to keep coming back. That, along with a robust postgame that alters every weapon and boss, lets you make the game even harder for more rewards, and offers even more reasons to play an already entrancing mix of RPG and action combat, has absolutely hooked me.

Hades is a Roguelite brawler, so each run is a run into hell and, hopefully, out the other side, and in between failures you spend earnings on new abilities and unlocks. But brawler is too padded and fleshy and imprecise a word, the clumsy heel of a palm, the stub of a haphazard elbow. During the run, during the failures, you are a wrecking ball with the focus of a laser, taking down pillars, slamming things into walls, blasting stone and crystal into shrapnel clouds of thick, gritty air.

Combat is based on a main attack and a special, along with a dodge and a cast, which means you lob a glossy gem into a baddy and it does them ill, but then lodges there, annoyingly, for longer than you might want it to. Beyond that it's based on weapon choices that define how attacks and specials play out.

The things you're smacking around are wonderful. Even early on you can expect bloated ghosts with huge bellies, flesh stained the sunset colours of Florida cocktails, nasty little all-legged things with sacks of horrors on their backs. Later how about a massive snake of bones, a deadly library book stamp, bullet-hell witches and a field filled with butterfly spewing gumballs? Bosses are great and draw from the classics, but I particularly love a cluster of gems from the very first rooms that bobbles around before striking you from afar.

In the first areas, you generally only have to worry about spike pits or turrets with trigger pads, so I leaned rather heavily on that dash. But then the second area throws lava everywhere, so overzealous dashing generally ends in unintentional barbecue. Onwards and upwards - risk and reward, risk and reward. And then...?

but what really clicks for me is the way that this procedural game allows you to procedurally clip together your own Zagreus each time, and each time it's bittersweet because you know things won't fall together in quite this way ever again. It's sad in Spelunky when I don't get the jetpack, but for one glorious ten minute spell in Hades I had a shield that bounced around between enemies for a hilariously long time and left electricity in its clattering wake. I could chuck my shield, do the school run and return in time to catch it in the middle of a room in which everyone but me had been fatally pummelled in my absence. Meanwhile my dash spawned dark little infernal whirlpools that dragged enemies in for extra damage.

While Elysium did prove to be a bit more challenging than Asphodel on early attempts due to inexperience, over time the only real threat was the boss at the end: the duo of Theseus and Asterius. No matter what my boons were, this pair always proved to be a difficult fight. Asterius has usually been no problem, but for some reason I struggled with Theseus, even alone, because of his shield. I'll chalk this up to a personal struggle rather than anything wrong with the game itself.

Right after convincing Cerberus to stand down, I stood face to face with the big man himself, Hades. I actually got very close to downing him in my first attempt, but I ended up struggling to figure out how to dodge a laser attack when I should have just stood behind some rocks.



On my next run, I got some lucky boons that both protected me and made short work of the titan.

At this point, the gameplay had gotten a bit stale to me. I found a boon called Divine Dash that single-handedly carried me through most of the game, turning what used to be something that could maybe resemble skill into a roll of the dice. Even this far in, I still had trouble seeing when I got hit, so the Divine Dash was a godsend (pun intended) for me and practically required for any kind of progression.

The only new gameplay content I could work towards were the weapon aspects, which are slight alterations to how a weapon functions. For my preferred weapon of choice, the spear, these aspects included a change to the spin attack that I never used and an alteration to the spear toss, something I only ever used when I got specific upgrades for it in a run. To me, these upgrades felt worthless, and on top of that, they had a high cost in a rare upgrade material: titan blood.

pair that with frenetic fast paced combat, game changing divine boons that synergise in all kinds of weird and wonderful ways,

Perfect balance of challenge and meaningful ability unlocks and upgrades.

What a masterpiece! From the voice acting, to the level design

Why? It could be because of the excellent controls, the more than solid mechanics and combat, the well thought upgrade-paths

Never a dull moment, the action is fast-paced yet the game play is surprisingly well balanced, not frustratingly difficult but gives enough challenge to motivate the player to move forward.

The only negative is the repetitive nature of the game that forces the player to grind, but its not as bothersome due to the fast-paced action, variety of monsters, traps and rewards. There is also a "handicap" system, that allows the player to customize various difficulty options to earn important items to unlock weapon abilities, and gift to each character to advance their own story lines.

My issue is that the runs are a bit too long. I kept dying on the end boss because I didn't understand its attack patterns well.

The combat feels punchy, and the multifarious mixture of weapons and single-run powers (boons) makes for a few hours of interesting combat. After that, it begins to feel like a smear of generic, furious button-mashing.

But the combat can be a visual mess,

The gameplay itself is pretty tight and flawless. You can unlock a variety of weapons to battle against repetition and I found combat quite engaging to the point I wanted to play more,

Hades has a God mode, which I wish I had switched on as soon as I started the game as it increases your defence after each death, helping to prevent tedium and repetition.

Then, the huge number of upgrades, weapons, synergies, dialogues, challenges, modifiers, etc... will make you stay and enjoy it like a kid.

-The combat alone is amazing and the game is a must-play just for that. It's fast, varied, tactical, flashy, intuitive and super fun

After unlocking more powerful stats, leveling trinkets and finally getting companions, you'll notice that the game is actually way easier than it used to be: Extra lives, double the HP, almost double the damage, stronger weapons, summon gold and health from thin air... Later in the game, you can increase the difficulty level incrementally by adding modifiers, also known as "Heat" Some of those modifiers are fun. They make enemies stronger, faster, more numerous, more challenging, even adding new patterns to bosses. But past a certain level of heat, there are modifiers that do the opposite: they reduce player choice, they remove content. Less upgrades, upgrades that are more costly, having to sell your upgrades every level, introducing a time limit...

Hades is a rogue-like, so you should be aware of what these are before playing. They aren't everyone's cup of tea and even for me I don't like most of them as they are simply too repetitive and lack reward. Hades stumbles in and out of this trap but I still enjoyed it quite a bit.

## Longevity

But each individual run is shaped by the gods you meet and the things you choose when they offer you a handful of their themed perks to pick from. Like the contents of the shopkeeper's store in Spelunky, this stuff can really mix things up and define an adventure. And the choices are often almost impossible. A dash that poisons or an attack that poisons? More doom or a brand new special? Do I want the people I have already killed, right, to make living enemies sick?

but what really clicks for me is the way that this procedural game allows you to procedurally clip together your own Zagreus each time, and each time it's bittersweet because you know things won't fall together in quite this way ever again.

That, and how buffs interact in myriad surprising and effective ways, means I'm still not tired of making these runs, dozens of hours later.

Those familiar with Greek myth are already aware of the fickle nature of the gods. Every now and then, treks through Hades present Zag with a Trial of the Gods, a chamber that allows you to select one of two different deities to commune with. Poseidon may be your bestie early on in your quest, but choose Dionysus over him in a later Trial and he won't hesitate to make your life a living hell in this particular chamber. Your reward, should you survive, is possessing two different boons at once as opposed to the typical one.

Sometimes the gods play nice together. Say, for example, you have the Curse of Agony from Ares, a boon that allows you to inflict doom status (which inflicts an additional burst of damage after a brief period of time) on an enemy with normal attacks. But if, upon clearing another chamber you find Athena's Divine Dash (which upgrades your dash move to deflect incoming attacks) a rare duo boon will activate, combining the strengths of both into one convenient package. In this case it creates Merciful End, which inflicts any enemy hit with a deflected attack with doom status. These combinations of powers are wonderful surprises. And let me tell you, that rabbit hole runs deep. There are a ton of different boons and combinations to earn, and you'll still be seeing new ones after dozens of runs. Like any good roguelike, Hades forces you to make difficult decisions that either complement your current build or throw caution to the wind and attempt a riskier build that could pay off four chambers down the line...if you survive long enough and luck into the boon you're hoping for.

the satisfying and tight gameplay and the glimpses into the lore will entice you to keep up playing

in procedurally scrambled rooms that have their own deadly doodads. You choose which rooms to travel through from a handful of doors that appear when you clear out all the baddies. Generally you're picking between what kind of pay-off you want once the next battle is done. The old gods were so baldly transactional. More health? One of a handful of in-game currencies for levelling up over time? Or a chance to get a gift from the squabbling cast of ancients?

The motivation to start over with the 40 th run here is not simply to master a challenge but to find out what waits beyond the temple of Styx and the story is well told that even the game credits will keep you watching. And will keep playing the game to unlock more story lines and weapon aspects. Hades is quite aware that you're going to be facing repetition. By this I mean that up until I finished playing there were still fresh dialogues appearing and after completing one run there were a lot of endgame options to make future runs more challenging. These are excellent features if you really enjoy rogue-likes and want to get mileage out of Hades.

Though I suppose that isn't terrible if you just want to play more of the game good repeatable gameplay you have to play A LOT before it feels repetitive fourteen times bigger and with almost infinite replayability. A perfect blend of permanent progression and randomized items and upgrades lost on death means that each run is unique and engaging, but after that I'll say this is a very poor roguelite with regard to replayability. The content just gets old very fast. The only new stuff is dialogue lines, and while they may lead to a few new gadgets, we're still talking about a few more dozens of runs just to see it through, replaying the exact same content.

I'm happy to keep repeating this cycle.

But even when I beat that boss and finish my journey, it's not over. The game tempts me with new materials to upgrade my weapons further and customize my home. But no matter how

many runs I win or how many times I've fallen, I'm always jumping out that window again, just trying to see what that first upgrade will be, and then the next, and then the next. Every time I tried out a new Hades patch, I would get lost in an endless cycle of runs for a week, and all my gaming time would disappear

by offering them tokens of appreciation in the form of nectar and ambrosia that you collect, which also grant you access to their own collection of keepsakes and up the chances of receiving rare, epic, and heroic variants of their boons with progressively better stats. And let me tell you, that rabbit hole runs deep. There are a ton of different boons and combinations to earn, and you'll still be seeing new ones after dozens of runs. All of that feeds into Hades' impressive replayability. Once again, I'm blown away by the staggering amount of content within Hades. While you may face the same bosses over and over again, they too will adapt to your increase in power level. Whether it be in the form of Street Fighter-style assists from siblings, sprouting new heads, or fancy new armor, repeated encounters with bosses felt fresh because of these clever modifications to how they fight. Like me, after a couple of successful escapes you may find yourself thinking, "How can I make subsequent attempts harder?" Enter the Pacts of Punishment, a challenge board that allows you to activate a number of modifiers to make Hades even more challenging. Toggling one on adds allows you to earn new rewards, making every playthrough fresh and exciting.

What sets Hades apart isn't just that it's a great roguelike with the kind of repeatable depth that makes it engrossing to play for hours

These interactions, as much as the precise combat, are the reason I kept coming back to Hades;

That, and how buffs interact in myriad surprising and effective ways, means I'm still not tired of making these runs, dozens of hours later.

Occasionally, you'll run into rooms where you can score two boons, but only after choosing one god and facing the wrath of the one you scorned as you fight off another round of enemies.

You get special rewards for using each of these weapons and beating the bosses as you make your way up to the surface, and each of those rewards unlocks some other kind of permanent progression.

You even get variants of some of the bosses to keep things interesting, and again,

It's so addictive and it pushes it on you aggressively.

It's repetitive and you get to a point where the fun is replaced with being annoyed.

It's an extreme grind fest and the buffs don't seem to do anything as a certain point.

It will give you RSI this thing is a massive button mash I don't think I've ever felt like my hands were this sore in a long, long time.

What sets Hades apart isn't just that it's a great roguelike with the kind of repeatable depth that makes it engrossing to play for hours,

Each of the six weapons you can equip pushes you to play differently, and weapon-specific modifiers nudge you towards using different parts of your toolset; you might be comfortable

poking enemies from afar with the Varatha spear, for example, but with a boon from Daedalus that triples the damage of your dash attack, you're going to want to close the distance and juke constantly. That, and how buffs interact in myriad surprising and effective ways, means I'm still not tired of making these runs, dozens of hours later.

While some players, myself included, have reached Hades' final scene, they still haven't puzzled out exactly what number of runs or other preconditions trigger it. But as with everything else in the game, it seems to be inevitable. You just have to keep making runs and talking to characters, who react to the sudden return of their queen. You just have to stick with it.

While sticking with Hades for what I thought was going to be an additional day but turned out to be an additional week of late-night "just one more run" sessions,

Like me, after a couple of successful escapes you may find yourself thinking, "How can I make subsequent attempts harder?" Enter the Pacts of Punishment, a challenge board that allows you to activate a number of modifiers to make Hades even more challenging. Toggling one on adds allows you to earn new rewards, making every playthrough fresh and exciting.

But even when I beat that boss and finish my journey, it's not over. The game tempts me with new materials to upgrade my weapons further and customize my home. But no matter how many runs I win or how many times I've fallen, I'm always jumping out that window again, just trying to see what that first upgrade will be, and then the next, and then the next.

Every time I tried out a new Hades patch, I would get lost in an endless cycle of runs for a week, and all my gaming time would disappear. Hades has always been so good that it's hard to put down,

Whether it's the game's smooth combat, deep loot systems, or engrossing story, I'm always motivated to boot it up and go for another run.

I get killed.

Return back to the beginning, only to get to know the characters.

Then the addiction of trying to escape again kicks in....

And it gets late....

Just going to try one more time.

I also need items!

But I hate lava. :S

Still have lingering addiction to this game. "I want to play Hades"

Despite how frustrating and repetitive it can be. Stills gives a thrill of each try.

And farming .. Getting enough, and then the reward for it. Sometimes it feels like I don't get anything at all cause I require more nectar or gems than each run gives.

And is fun to fight enemies ~~

When I wrote this review, I was at 51 h .. Now at 113 h

I still haven't completed all the side stories yet ... Hoping for the the dialouge to show up can feel like an eternity. Heh.

Just to add my positive review to the pile: Hades has been one of the most addictive games I've played in a while, in the best sense of the word.

In the first few runs, it might be hard to spot any significant progress, or it might seem very difficult to even enjoy it. But the gorgeous visuals, the great voice acting, the satisfying and tight gameplay and the glimpses into the lore will entice you to keep up playing.

Then, the huge number of upgrades, weapons, synergies, dialogues, challenges, modifiers, etc... will make you stay and enjoy it like a kid. Once you get into it, you have to play A LOT before it feels repetitive. The fact that each dialogue is voice acted and that I've rarely heard the same line twice in +60h still amazes me.

Hades has all the stuff that makes Supergiant's games awesome, but it's fourteen times bigger and with almost infinite replayability. Very recommended.

-The combat alone is amazing and the game is a must-play just for that. It's fast, varied, tactical, flashy, intuitive and super fun...

-The roguelike elements serve their purpose incredibly well. A perfect blend of permanent progression and randomized items and upgrades lost on death means that each run is unique and engaging, but you can also feel yourself progressing and becoming stronger. What all of this means is that the game warrants being played again and again and again which is great, considering how fun it is.

Great game. It is nailing the gameplay loop to make it fun and addictive. After every run you go to the hub and even if you did not succeed, you will have some new dialogues, events, you will upgrade the character, unlock new weapon... something new will happen almost every time. And once you unlock the upgrades, you just want to start again to see how it affects next run. So you keep doing this loop (unlock new stuff, test new stuff) until next morning :-D

Update: After 50+ "deaths", finally reached the ending, the story is well told that even the game credits will keep you watching. And will keep playing the game to unlock more story lines and weapon aspects.

Fantastic game. Played it on Xbox One X and it is fast, beautiful and seriously addictive. I have finished Dead Cells, Hollow Knight, The Ascent, Children of Morta, etc, and it is by far the best one..

One small warning: A serious time sink.

When you finally decide to take another stab at escaping, runs are broken up into a few different worlds, each made up of several randomly ordered chambers. Hades' combat builds on Bastion's tight, isometric fights and infuses them with the endlessly repeatable appeal of random buffs, modifiers, random enemy layouts, currencies, and progression that slowly turn the seemingly impossible task of reaching the surface into something manageable.

it is a game whose structure and story are both rooted in repeated, inescapable failure

Given the number of possible permutations of your progress both through the game and with various characters, it is a mind-bogglingly complex narrative system that somehow manages to feel coherent at almost all times.

Hades presents the illusion of difficulty and a brutal learning curve, but it ensures that, no matter what, everybody will eventually get over the finish line. Its ever-changing labyrinth is a hall of mirrors, but not in a maliciously deceptive way.

game changing divine boons that synergise in all kinds of weird and wonderful ways the way it makes random, repetitive content feel unique by constantly delivering meaningful variations.

There are also a variety of weapons and skills to suit the style of the player, variety of monsters, traps and rewards.

You can unlock a variety of weapons to battle against repetition and I found combat quite engaging to the point I wanted to play more

You'll be seeing the same 3/4 areas a lot and despite some variations in how levels are laid out, they still fall under the same themes of fire/dungeon etc should be warned that if you want variety you won't find it here.

Every run through the game's 4 levels is different due to the many varied power-ups, both permanent and temporary, that you as the player have to choose from huge number of upgrades, weapons, synergies

I've rarely heard the same line twice in +60h still amazes me.

this is seriously lacking and does not provide enough content to justify the tons of runs on the very same content required to unlock the aspects and advance the stories

The game's layout stays relatively the same. There are 4 levels you go through. The enemy types are always the same, the bosses have slight variations (after tinkering with difficulty) with the final boss being identical every run.

This limited amount of biomes, enemies, bosses and gods

At the start of each run you pick a legendary weapon, like the Aegis shield

work towards were the weapon aspects, which are slight alterations to how a weapon functions. For my preferred weapon of choice, the spear, these aspects included a change to the spin attack that I never used and an alteration to the spear toss, something I only ever used when I got specific surprising amount of tactical depth from half a dozen weapon types and a deceptively simple moveset comprising standard, heavy and ranged attacks; a rechargeable super; and a dash.upgrades for it in a run. To me, these upgrades felt worthless, and on top of that, they had a high cost in a rare upgrade material: titan blood.

The telegraph

surprising amount of tactical depth from half a dozen weapon types and a deceptively simple moveset comprising standard, heavy and ranged attacks; a rechargeable super; and a dash. sheer volume of variables in this 'finished', fully-featured 1.0 release (also available on Nintendo Switch) is mind-boggling

However once you fall under Hades' spell after a couple of runs the near limitless combinations of character builds becomes bewitching.

Each jewel in Zagreus' armoury – brass-knuckles, greatshield and sword, railgun, spear – has its own rhythm: some favour quick flurries at close range, others charge up to unleash

hell on rooms full of gorgons and cursed chariots. Conquered chambers sometimes bring a new blessing from one of Zagreus' relatives up on Mount Olympus, These abilities arrive in endless new combinations, starting fresh each time you set foot into Tartarus. It makes each run at the underworld exciting and different, even with the same few weapons; each time you think, yes, this is the build that's going to get me past the hydra or the minotaur.

deceptively simple combat arsenal. I have a basic attack, a special move, a dash, and a ranged attack called a Cast that fires a ranged barb that sticks into enemies for a brief time. And I have these attacks for each of my six weapons — but I can select only one weapon prior to each run. I can upgrade and alter each of these moves every run, and they combine into something unique every time I play.

This boss fight has a few different varieties

But each individual run is shaped by the gods you meet and the things you choose when they offer you a handful of their themed perks to pick from. Like the contents of the shopkeeper's store in Spelunky, this stuff can really mix things up and define an adventure. And the choices are often almost impossible. A dash that poisons or an attack that poisons? More doom or a brand new special? Do I want the people I have already killed, right, to make living enemies sick?

but what really clicks for me is the way that this procedural game allows you to procedurally clip together your own Zagreus each time, and each time it's bittersweet because you know things won't fall together in quite this way ever again. It's sad in Spelunky when I don't get the jetpack,

Its ever-changing labyrinth is a hall of mirrors, but not in a maliciously deceptive way.

My method, crude though it might be, works. But I've also watched my partner, friends, and various Twitch streamers take other approaches

Each of these Infernal Arms is geared to complement a certain playstyle. Want to get in the thick of it and wreck some demons? Then consider the straightforward Stygian Blade. Prefer to peck at foes from a safe distance? Then channel your inner Artemis and use the bow.

Later you'll unlock a bashing shield, a spear, and more, and each plays significantly differently, creating one of many layers of replayability for Hades.

Their aid comes in the form of boons (run-specific tokens from the gods that grant Zag godly power-ups) that modify to Zag's abilities, making every run feel new and unique. Some are smaller, min-max stat-worthy benefits that often feel like a daily vitamin

You're constantly given incentive to shake up your playstyle

endlessly repeatable appeal of random buffs, modifiers, random enemy layouts, currencies, and progression that slowly turn the seemingly impossible task of reaching the surface into something manageable.

Each of the six weapons you can equip pushes you to play differently, and weapon-specific modifiers nudge you towards using different parts of your toolset;

Because of this, your build is going to be absurdly fluid and will be vastly different from run to run. It helps that each of the weapons also feels completely different too.



Boons (power ups) come by way of the many Olympic deities you call family, and that personal touch will likely result in you playing favorites... which can come with it's own surprises.

the action is fast-paced yet the game play is surprisingly well balanced, not frustratingly difficult but gives enough challenge to motivate the player to move forward.

the way it makes random, repetitive content feel unique by constantly delivering meaningful variations.

underworld's three realms. They're made up of randomized chambers where a set number of enemies spawn

Epiloguegaming

The Temple of Styx is very different from prior biomes in that how long it takes is RNG based.

Polygon

a random upgrade on my way out the door, increasing my combat potential or drastically altering the way I battle.

ign

combat against a randomized variety of enemies

every randomly ordered room you pass through

divine boons that synergise in all kinds of weird and wonderful ways

Boons (power ups) come by way of the many Olympic deities you call family, and that personal touch will likely result in you playing favorites... which can come with it's own surprises.

multifarious mixture of weapons and single-run powers (boons) makes for a few hours of interesting combat

accept a boon, like the one from Dionysus that adds hangover damage (read "poison") to your attacks

I got some lucky boons that both protected me and made short work of the titan.

I found a boon called Divine Dash that single-handedly carried me through most of the game

The magic is provided by boons - quite literally gifts from the gods

The guardian

boons that add a watery damage-dealing flourish to your dash or imbue your weapon with lightning, calls that summon gods to unleash magical arrows or make you invincible.

polygon

I'm awarded a different upgrade after every battle

the game randomly offers me one of two things: a Boon or a Daedalus Hammer.

combined with powerful Boons, it could be the key to my escape attempt.

Boons imbue Zagreus with a fraction of the gods' powers, to help him on his journey

These Boons offer me minor effects that impact various aspects of combat, usually focused on my attack, special, or Cast

If I pick up the Daedalus upgrade that lets my shield bounce, maybe I would want to find a Zeus Boon that causes my special to spawn lightning bolts on every enemy hit by my special attack? Or a Boon from Dionysus that transforms my Cast into a hazy pool that stuns and poisons targets inside, keeping them still for my shield to bounce.

Each Hades run is full of randomized powerups and “boons” from various gods and goddesses that imbue Zagreus with additional powerful abilities but only last until you die.

gamespot

Most buffs, called boons, are tied to individual gods;

## **E.4 Aesthetic**

# Theme: Aesthetic

This document contains all codes sorted under the theme aesthetics and its subthemes. Please note that sometimes surrounding sentences have been included for context.

## Rock 'n Lute Music

Full voice acting and an enchanting soundtrack are layered on to create what should be an absolute masterpiece.

Supergiant Games is known for its musical craft: Bastion's somber tones of a world lost, Transistor's lounge-singer popstar lyrics soaked in sorrow, and Pyre's epic poem-esque melodies are a constant in my Spotify playlist. It should surprise no one that the music of Hades is unlike any of those, but still of the same caliber as composer Darren Korb's memorable compositions. Hades is a blend of Rock n' Lute, a melodic partnership between old and new that always pumps me up for my next journey through the Underworld. A lot of the music is diegetic, meaning it exists within the world of Hades, in that it's usually sung as a hymn from the legendary musician Orpheus.

At the same time, Hades' score is decidedly understated relative to Supergiant's previous games, but it all comes together to serve the tone and characters of the underworld. I think the highest compliment I can pay to the Hades soundtrack is that it simply belongs. I didn't know what Euridice the Muse sounded like, but hearing her sing a lonely tune in an alcove of Asphodel just felt right.

Story, art, music, voice-acting, atmosphere? A+.

Sure, I want every run to end in victory, but I also want to buy that music stand for the throne room, unlock all the keepsakes, and see how this romantic subplot plays out. Like Orpheus I look back, only unlike him I'm happy to keep repeating this cycle.

Getting into a rhythm, launching a combo then zooming around the battlefield like I've got wings on my sandals, puts me in such a focused flow-state I don't notice the soundtrack accentuating the action. If a game can distract me from Darren Korb rocking out then it's doing everything right.

The whole thing is wrapped in the Supergiant's typically gorgeous visuals and stunning music.

Excellent controls, voice acting and music. Perfect balance of challenge and meaningful ability unlocks and upgrades.

What a masterpiece! From the voice acting, to the level design, music, progression and story...

The outstanding artwork, the great and original story, the well written characters, the numberless references to greek mythology, the eye-winking irony, the speaker cast. And: the

soundtrack! Everything is done with so much love for detail, originality and feel for great mature entertainment.

Chatchy music, it gets stuck in your head. But not mindblowing. Good voice acting, each character has a perfect voice for their sprite. Either soft-spoken, boastful etc. Still have some feeling of softness in it. Or maybe there are no voice actors and the characters actually the ones who speak! ( Plottwist )

... a solid 10/10. And I didn't even mention the outstanding soundtrack.

The music, voice acting, the graphisme, everything is perfect.

Not to mention that all of this is leveraged by the absolutely stellar voice acting.

-The music and sound design are incredible. Each hit is accentuated perfectly and every environment is enriched greatly by the ambiance. The soundtrack is godly, nothing less, I will never get enough of it, no matter how many times I hear it.

The music is so good that you'll stop playing and just listen.

The music is 10/10. So good I actively listen to it outside the game.

Since launching into Early Access two years ago, Hades has grown from being an excellent roguelite with a surprisingly touching story and beautiful art and sound design into being, well, still an excellent roguelite, but now with even more content and a surprisingly heartbreaking story.

Any roguelike fans, action fans, greek mythology fans, or anyone who just appreciates a rock solid game with beauty art and sound design MUST check out Hades.

The core gameplay is fun, and the game looks and sounds good. But the combat can be a visual mess, the story and characters lack any emotional depth, and you need to be prepared to play the game through 20+ times to reach the ending. And the ending itself is a big ol' slap in the face anticlimax.

## Vivid Art

And renovate your house!

Hades is shown from a top-down perspective. I get to see Zagreus, and all my friends up close when they speak — thanks to beautiful character portraits — but most of the time I'm a red blur dashing between enemies.

The game tempts me with new materials to upgrade my weapons further and customize my home.

...Hades has grown from being an excellent roguelite with a surprisingly touching story and beautiful art and sound design into being, ...

The whole thing is wrapped in the Supergiant's typically gorgeous visuals and stunning music.

Hades is one of the best roguelites of all-time. It's a phenomenal achievement in story telling, gameplay, and an absolute treat for both your eyes and ears

The majority of the treasure trades involved mere cosmetics to the hub, hardly worth the effort in acquiring.

...everyone from long-suffering fury Megaera to layabout Sisyphus is brought to life, with a solid vocal portrayal and art like they stepped out of a Mike Mignola comic.

I often forget about the call because that gauge doesn't stand out beneath the attention-grabbing red health bar, though sometimes a text pop-up will remind me (probably because the game knows I rarely use the thing).

Whoever's responsible for the timing and animation should pat themselves on the back, because dashing feels great, whether used to backstab a skeleton, or ...

The journey of Zagreus, son of Hades, through the labyrinthine Underworld toward the freedom of the mortal realm unfolds from an isometric perspective as you take on hordes of colorfully animated undead that fill the screen...

Even when you're pushing a raft across lava there's a sense that the rocks around you are just so, that they melt and ooze because artists have thought about their insides, and are in love, above all else, with texture. After every run of Zagreus' attempts to escape the underworld, he returns to a house that is positively lurid with texture and sharp edges and glimmer. The famed gods live in a sort of McMansion, or a Las Vegas hotel's Presidential Suite, bad taste spared absolutely no expense.

Any roguelike fans, action fans, greek mythology fans, or anyone who just appreciates a rock solid game with beauty art and sound design MUST check out Hades.

So what's the difference? For me it's the production values and the narrative. The outstanding artwork, the great and original story, ...

The graphics are colorful and well-drawn,

Played it on Xbox One X and it is fast, beautiful and seriously addictive.

The core gameplay is fun, and the game looks and sounds good. But the combat can be a visual mess,

The graphics of Hades are close to what I would call cell-shaded.

Lovely art! All the characters looks dynamic and have good designs that fits them. Like how some random colour dots of green and purple makes everything so vibrant. The areas looks cool, and stylish. Fits the games gener and its story. Pleasing to look at.

The characters are likable, the voice acting and aesthetic are on point - all the usual SuperGiant stuff.

In the first few runs, it might be hard to spot any significant progress, or it might seem very difficult to even enjoy it. But the gorgeous visuals, ...

The music, voice acting, the graphisme, everything is perfect.

The visuals are breathtaking, with an amazingly distinctive visual style courtesy of the hand drawn environments and beautifully animated characters. Visually stunning without relying on demanding graphics. Style above all else.

Good learning curve, new weapons unlocking, learning each biome, and the game is gorgeous.

I get to see Zagreus, and all my friends up close when they speak — thanks to beautiful character portraits —

Perhaps this is just everyone's lockdown libido desperately searching for an outlet, but in the past couple of weeks social media has gone mad for art director Jen Zee's wonderfully drawn gods and monsters, with their elegant musculature, casually revealing outfits and appropriately godlike profiles. I get it. This game worships the beautiful lines of the human body almost as much as the classical sculptors who hewed the Elgin marbles. Even the Minotaur is kind of hot.

Powered by chugging guitars, frenetic fighting and luscious, flamboyant depictions of figures from Greek mythology, this excellent action game from the arthouse studio Supergiant has been many years in the making.

Everyone is Hot.

One thing that this game does that they've not done before is to make sure that nearly everyone you meet is as hot as Hell. That's not a necessity in a game, but it's always nice when it's there.

"Maybe everyone is too hot?"

Instead it's his father Hades, a goth beefcake Santa who spends all day shouting at paperwork and moaning about his underlings, who fills that role.

hot men

everyone is so hot

everyone is hot

everyone is sexy

god I want megaera to step on me

good game, Ares is hot





F

Demo pictures

